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LEAH



By the AUTHOR OF
"DOUGHT WE TO VISIT HER."

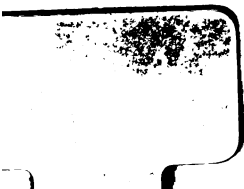


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ON.

LEAH:

A WOMAN OF FASHION.

BY

MRS. EDWARDES,

AUTHOR OF "OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?"

"SUSAN FIELDING," "STEVEN LAWRENCE," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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1. The first part of the report discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also provides a brief overview of the methodology used in the study.

2. The second part of the report presents the results of the study. It includes a detailed analysis of the data collected and a discussion of the findings.

3. The third part of the report discusses the implications of the study and provides recommendations for future research. It also includes a conclusion and a list of references.

4. The fourth part of the report is a summary of the study and its findings. It includes a brief overview of the methodology used and a discussion of the results.

5. The fifth part of the report is a list of references. It includes a list of all the sources used in the study.



LEAH : A WOMAN OF FASHION.



CHAPTER I.

BALM IN GILEAD.

PERFECT love casteth out fear. Leah Pascal's "fancy," a caprice born of idleness, nurtured by vanity, shivers under the first breath of adversity it is called upon to meet. A woman of larger intelligence would have given Danton the chance, at least, of explanation ; in the face of harshest evidence, have believed him free until his own lips confirmed the story of his marriage.

A woman of larger soul had said, "Married, or not married, I love him, and must love him still; *that* can no weakness, no unworthiness of his undo!" But you will generally find that human beings are pitiless in nice proportion to their breadth of moral vision. Her own pride brought low, her own vanity sharply stabbed, resentment against the man who has caused her to suffer—these, not love's all-embracing, all-extenuating anguish, are the first emotions roused in Leah Pascal's breast. With a face of marble, but collected of demeanour as though the whole scene were some amusing drawing-room charade, she listens to Danton's calumniators for yet another ten minutes. Then, with just her usual voice and manner, wishes "good night" all round, salutes the tip of Prince Charming's whisker, bestows a coquettish parting glance upon Lord Stair, and makes her way lightly up to her room—shared with her by little Deb in Naomi's absence.

The child sleeps profoundly ; crushed, humiliated, burning with angry passion though she be, Leah is faithful to the one unselfish instinct of her nature ; walks straight to her sister's pillow, stoops, and kisses her. Debbie sleeps profoundly, the smile of innocence on her lips ; the smell of the Gloire de Dijon roses on the toilet-table makes the room sweet. That smile, that sweetness, fall like madness on Leah's over-wrought brain, for both speak to her of Danton ! Double-locking her door, she flings herself, dressed as she is, upon her bed, and through all the early hours of the night keeps her watch—that ghastly first watch over a new-slain hope—alone.

Withhold your pity because her love is not of the finest ? Oh, reader, pity her the more. Noble sorrows bring their own consolation. The sufferings of inferior, narrower natures, should appeal to one like the blind physical pain of an animal—a pain

over which no modifying influence of soul or will has power.

The other inmates of the house go to their rooms ; Leah hears them not. Danton, after a while, returns, pausing, lover-like, outside her door as he passes. She hears him not. She is in the state of nerves when our bodily perceptions become blunted, when all outward objects of sense are but as shadows beside the torturing grief within. At last the short night of Paris ouvrier life is spent ; the rumbling wheels of the market carts, the cries of the country people, begin to be heard in the streets below, and with a shiver Leah starts abruptly from the bed. She is cold—ice-cold, and sick. Bodily discomfort arouses her from her trance of bitter passion ; she undresses, gets into bed beside warm, little, softly-breathing Debbie, and falls into the deep sleep of exhaustion ; dreams fair dreams even, poor child, of moonlight walks with Danton, in which

diamonds glitter on her wrists and bosom (Jack Chamberlayne's diamonds), and the Gloire de Dijon roses are in her hand. Happy for Leah Pascal if she die ere the spirit of that dream be realised !

It is late in the morning before she stirs ; and when at last her heavy eyes uncloze, for a few mocking seconds her dreams are with her still—"not imagined, felt." Then comes the dreadful flash of full returning consciousness, and then—the necessity, familiar to most of us, of living and making no sign that the heart within one's breast is dead. Joys may be exceptional ; grief never is unique. No commonplace day that dawns but is the conflux to a million human beings of two eternities of pain. Throughout this city of Paris, do you suppose hundreds of women are not going through just such an awakening as Leah Pascal's ? Each thinking her own fate the hardest, each crying out in her soul against the

Juggernaut society, the letter of whose laws, while she tramples the spirit under foot, she is too weak or too cowardly to set at naught.

The necessity of living! Leah rises, dresses with as much fond care as usual, and comes down pale, but "in spirits," to her mid-day breakfast, and to the accustomed flirtation that seasons it. Lord Stair is more her slave than ever throughout the meal; by a thousand delicate and unobtrusive attentions shows his care for her, insists upon her drinking champagne instead of the vin compris of the table, makes her laugh even—she finds it easier to laugh than smile—over the latest bit of Paris gossip. And Leah feels grateful to him. All men are worthless; at that generalisation she arrived long ago; the thought of love is noxious to her as is that of food to a fevered palate. Still, for such services as vanity demands, as well utilise Lord Stair's devotion as another's.

When Jack comes round in his smart mail phaeton at two o'clock, he finds Miss Pascal ready dressed—the first time since their engagement such punctuality has rewarded him—and looking handsomer than her wont.

“I never saw you wear a veil before,” Leah,” says Mr. Chamberlayne, staring at his beloved with amative lack-lustre gaze; “and it becomes you wonderfully, by Jove! Why, you have quite a colour! I’ve always told you what you wanted was colour.”

So—a veil and a little rouge can patch up the ravages of such a night of passion as the last!

Leah takes her place beside her lover, drives along with him to the Bois—aye, past that Allée in the Champs Elysées where she walked with Danton fifteen hours before—and feels that as long as she can command fine-stepping horses, and irreproachable dress,

and see the eyes of men and women follow her as she passes, there may be balm in Gilead yet. When she returns to the Rue Castiglione, a couple of hours later, a glow that is not wholly due to art is on her cheeks. Her hand lingers in Jack's at parting. She confesses, by not denying, that she looks forward to a winter spent under Italian skies, with feelings of happiness that almost equal his. Jack drives away intoxicated—for one time at least in his life—not by absinthe.

Half way up the stairs appear Deb and Naomi, flying at headlong speed down to meet their sister.

"Cousin Bell has come, Leah! Cousin Bell has come! All the house smells like M. Rimmel's shop, and she has thirteen packages, and wants to have tea before dinner, and her hair is puffed up on her head like the ladies at the play." So shrieks Debbie.

"Cousin Bell has brought me the loveliest chatelaine," cries Naomi—a flutter of genuine agitation in her voice—"and she says I ought to wear my dresses real grown-up length now. And I am to go and stay with her in London, and be introduced. And, oh, Leah"—this in a whisper—"isn't Cousin Bell's face made up? Why, the powder *stands* on her nose!"

Leah, at the news, lifts her veil, and hastily rubs her handkerchief over her cheeks (does Leah love Cousin Bell so well as to weep over her arrival? thinks Deb), then puts a smile on her lips—we have seen before that she is clever at this essentially feminine accomplishment—and runs up, preceded by the two wildly-excited children, to the drawing-room.

"Bell! A day earlier than we expected! Such a delightful surprise—how thoughtful, how good of you!"

"My dearest girl!"—they embrace—"I

was so anxious to be here at the last to help you" — they embrace again — "and I knew I should look a wreck for the wedding, unless I had two clear days after the horrid sea-sickness. You own sweet pet!"

They embrace for the third time; then fall to scrutinising each other's faces, as pretty women do, who are at once closest friends and direst rivals

"The poor thing has not thriven on her engagement," remarks Bell. "Engaged people never do thrive. I lost seven pounds and a half before I married Mr. Baltimore. The incessant trouble of the dressmakers, I suppose."

"Or the misplaced anxiety of one's friends," answers Leah. "But tell me about yourself, Bell, dear. You are not looking a quarter as well as you did in Scarborough. What will you have — tea? In this barbarous house they never give us

five o'clock tea ; but I will order some for you at once."

Then, each having relieved her anxiety as to the other's health, the two dear friends settle down on a sofa beside the fire and grow confidential—so confidential that Deb and Naomi, listening with the avid attention of unfledged girls, find it difficult at all times to decipher the meaning of their talk. The better, perhaps, for such rudimentary morals as Naomi and little Deb may possess.

"Laura Griffiths is looking saffron-coloured." Mrs. Baltimore has been spending the past month in Brighton ; her stories of well-known London people are consequently as full-bodied as though it were June, not October. "Saffron, indeed, is hardly the word—that dead, thick gamboge, rather, that dark women do turn when they go wrong in their affections. And Sir George passes her without bowing. This

I can vouch for. He was riding with me on the cliff, the other day, when we met her. The old dowager has taken lately to prune de Monsieur liveries, and you should have seen how Sir George enjoyed it when I commented, as a matter of taste, on the mixture of purple and yellow! Always the fate of what are called superior women," adds Bell, malignantly. "Poor Laura ought to have lived in the age of Sir Charles Grandison. No man, nowadays, will dance a sentimental minuet for longer than a fortnight at a time."

"Especially if the sentimental minuet necessitates a gamboge complexion! Have you been seeing as much as ever of little Arty Cresswell?"

"Arty Cresswell—why, have I not told you about the great Burton catastrophe? You know at what pace things were proceeding at Scarborough! Well, Arty, it seems, confided in some one else (that mys-

terious some one else, who never actually comes to the light), or left his keys about, or—tiring of the whole affair—sent the letters himself. Every version has had its day and supporters. At all events, the letters—*her* letters, you understand—arrived one fine morning, labelled and dated, and directed in a neat packet to Mr. Burton.”

“Who knew everything, as well as the rest of the world, from the first,” suggests Leah, with airy cynicism, worthy of Cousin Bell herself.

“Yes; and who, knowing everything, was naturally furious at having his eyes forced open against his will! You can imagine the set of tableaux that followed. Repentant wife on her knees, hair dishevelled, Spartan husband. Her mother sent for. His mother sent for. Children sent for. Clergy. Lawyers. Curtain.”

“And now?”

“Arty Cresswell has gone, for his health,

to the Pacific. The children have gone, for their education, to Germany. Mrs. Burton is living on five-and-twenty shillings a-week at Dieppe, and poor, injured, innocent Mr. Burton is deer-stalking in the Highlands."

"All these things end so samely," says Leah. "A pity some one does not strike out something new in the way of domestic catastrophes. It must have been much better fun in the good old days of hair triggers and twelve paces."

"When men fought with each other, women, at least, had a better chance," says Bell, savagely. "Depend upon it, gentlemen would contrive to keep their eyes wider open if they knew that their blindness might have to be paid for by an ounce or so of cold lead eventually!"

Mrs. Baltimore lives on men's praise, in men's society; has men friends by the hundred; has embittered men's homes, if she

has not broken their hearts, by the score—and hates them! Not, perhaps, as she hates her own sex—*that* feeling is instinctive, warm, human; but rather with the wary, cold hatred of political antagonists. A type of woman belonging to an altogether advanced stage of civilisation, but growing every day we live more common.

“Mrs. Burton is not blameless, of course; indeed with a child of Arty’s age, the whole thing must have been her doing from the first. Yet, of the two—the husband and wife I mean—she is infinitely the least contemptible. That is my opinion. The world, with its usual fine bow-wow justice (the world with grown-up daughters especially), cuts Mrs. Burton in the street, and invites Mr. Burton to stay in the Highlands.”

“Grown-up daughters remind one of Maggie McDormond,” says Leah, languidly interested in the Burton tragedy—“Maggie Atkinson, by this time, I suppose.”

"Maggie McDormond? Is it possible there can be another big scandal I have not written about? Maggie McDormond, my dear, has . . . gone to the mischief."

Naomi and Deb both edge further forward on their chairs.

"When you left England, she was on the eve, as you know, of a most ridiculously good marriage."

"I remember. One of the Patent Mustard people, was it not? Eight thousand a year, and all the little McDormond's to be taken into the business."

"Well, at the very last, as near her wedding-day as you are, she decamped with the footman."

Even Leah opens her eyes at this. The two children give a little cry of delight.

"The footman . . . stay ; the German master . . . something utterly disgraceful, I know. Ah, I recollect ! It *was* the German music-master ; a sentimental young person,

with white hair falling on his shoulders, who talked about High Art and Elective Affinities. Little as I like the McDormonds generally," adds Bell, "I must say I felt for the people in their disgrace. Nothing is so impossible to live down as the misconduct of an unmarried daughter."

Leah's cheeks flush to a livelier red than they borrowed from artifice an hour ago. But the light is waning; the curtains across Madame's windows are close drawn; and Cousin Bell, absorbed in her own stories, sees nothing.

"Poor old McDormond ran after his daughter, they say, and just caught her in time to be too late. She had been married the day before. So much for demure little girls who get up at six in the morning to study Mozart, and who decline fast dances on principle."

"She will have her reward, Bell" How coldly, articulately Leah speaks! Who could

guess what vain remorse, what passionate memories grasp her heart at this moment? "A woman who makes a love-match needs no worse fate than to be forced to live out a love-match. How is Brighton—as pleasant and as wicked as Scarborough was?"

"Wicked enough in all conscience; I cannot say much about its being pleasant. Every place bores one equally after a week. We have had Tatters and suite to amuse us, for one thing."

Leah's face betrays livelier emotion than even the misfortunes of her dearest friends have had power to elicit from her.

"Tatters! And does she drive the same ponies still?—the Cholmondoley ponies, I mean. And how does she dress? And has she taken yet to furs? I would sooner rely on Tatters for real taste than on all these Parisian men-milliners together."

"Tatters, my dear, came out the day before I left Brighton in the very most exqui-

site costume I ever saw. Ruby velvet, with ermine—so deep—for trimming, and amethyst buttons, that they say belonged to Marie Antoinette. They were purchased for a fabulous price at the Empress Eugénie's sale—authentic historical buttons, not wretched imitations," adds Bell, mournfully, "such as we outsiders are forced to be content with."

Leah's heightened colour, her eyes, her lips, all evince the warmest interest in the subject. "And what was her hat? But I need scarcely ask—*en suite*, of course."

"Her hat," answers Mrs. Baltimore, "was a Louis Seize hunting-hat, of ruby velvet, with a clasp, absolutely princely in value, to match the buttons."

"And purchased also at the Empress Eugénie's sale?"

"No ; the clasp was made expressly for her at Hunt and Roskell's ; I know the history of every stone ; the handle of her

driving-whip richly set with amethysts and diamonds to match."

"Such a dress is impossible," says Leah, with a sigh. "One might get as far as the buttons, perhaps."

... "And without them the dress is simply a ruby velvet and ermine, such as Mesdames Brown, Jones, and Robinson can order at their milliner's. Impossible to imitate Tatters, without Tatters' resources."

"And who is she Leah?" cries Naomi, perfectly unable to restrain her feelings longer. "The very happiest person on earth, I am sure."

"You should never ask questions when your betters are speaking, Naomi. I have told you so often. However, on this occasion, perhaps, your curiosity is laudable. Tatters is—Bell, would you kindly enlighten the children's heathen ignorance?"

"Tatters is one of the best dressed women in London," says Bell, gravely, "as she is

certainly one of the most envied. Tatters drives the finest horses that money can buy, she sets the fashion in dress, and, it has even been hinted, in manners. Whene'er she takes her walks abroad half the heads in London turn to look at her."

"As they will after Leah," interrupts Debbie's shrill treble. "When Leah marries she is going to be a fine lady of fashion, like you, Cousin Bell, and Madame Tatters."

Happily the appearance of Désiré, with five o'clock tea, puts an end to the conversation.





CHAPTER II.

AN ENCHANTRESS A LA MODE.

BELL BALTIMORE is fair, free, and five-and-thirty; tall of stature, upright as a dart, and as nearly graceful as a woman can be who owes full one half of her graces to training, rather than nature. Not fair by temperament—the dark brow and eyelash tell you that—but blonde by long bleaching of the hair, long powdering of the skin—fair, as we of the nineteenth century have grown to accept the word in

common parlance. A wonderfully pretty woman, even though her youth (and such a youth!) be over; lips sweet as the petals of a wild rose; a little nose, half-inclined to impertinence, and the handsomest pair of mocking, cold, blue eyes that ever smiled away the reason and the fortunes of men.

Poor Bell—what a throat and arms she once had! Well, when she had them, she displayed them liberally, and now that she has them no longer, she displays them not at all. Chest delicate, say the faculty. Whatever the sacrifice, the lungs must *not* be exposed to night air. Some weaker sisters thus circumstanced might give up health to fashion. Bell does nothing of the kind; accepts her doom like a martyr, and in a ball-room, with clouds of diaphonous gauze rising to her chin, and softening every angle of shoulder and elbow, looks as girlish of figure still as many a budding beauty of nineteen. Never was woman a greater adept

at knowing how much it is good to show than Bell Baltimore. I speak not of elbows only. She carries the supreme art of artless reticence into friendship, flirtation, love—into every relation of human existence.

Married in her teens to a man a score of years her senior, Bell, by the time she was seven-and-twenty, was left alone to steer her little bark among the shoals and quicksands of fast London life. Mr. Baltimore got attached to the embassy in St. Petersburg, and Bell's lungs—so the same accommodating faculty declared—were too delicate to accompany him. Scandal? Not a bit of it. They lived together as long as fate permitted them, like angels; was it not through the interest of one of Bell's devoted friends that dear Robert got his appointment? Mrs. Baltimore, then as now, was immensely admired, run after; and Mr. Baltimore—well, let us say that Mr. Baltimore had the good taste and feeling to enjoy his wife's popularity. Who

can forget Bell's beautiful conduct after his departure? How she refused two consecutive balls, gave up Ascot and the Derby, and could only be induced to go to Goodwood with the quietest little party of four, and in half-mourning!

A young woman of seven-and-twenty cannot pine away and die because her husband lives in Russia. Bell, of course, rallied. Every letter from St. Petersburg exhorted her to amuse herself, and she was far too good a wife to neglect the wishes of her absent lord. She rallied; went out next season more than ever; perhaps into a society one shade faster than she had frequented with Robert, and from that time to the present has—the word looks malicious, and yet I can find no other to replace it—has floated! With occasional submergencies, I must confess. Are there not submergencies in every career, political, literary, artistic?

The career of a votary of fashion is no exception to the rule.

Well, when women in the lower grades of life, wretched seamstresses or mill-girls, once get their heads under water, they very seldom trouble society by coming to the surface more. Bell, wise in her generation, has consistently made to herself friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, and in high places—friends who, after considerable patience, with a good deal of hard pulling, have each time succeeded in bringing her to dry land. “Mrs. Baltimore was cut at one time by two-thirds of London,” shrieks shrill-toned malice. “Cut, or not cut, I have always gone to court regularly,” says Bell’s calm voice; “not because the ceremonial amuses me, but because, in Robert’s position, during Robert’s absence, I feel that it is the right thing for me to do.”

How can Mrs. Brown and Lady Smith

refuse the acquaintance of a lady who, as a duty, jostles elbows with every duchess and marchioness in the land at the Palace drawing-rooms?

A good many people do refuse it: old friends of her husband, well-wishers of her children—Bell has actually a pair of small daughters away under the stern wing of Mr. Baltimore's sisters in Scotland. The world generally accepts her, under protest! "Not a person I would allow my Lucretia to be seen with in any public place, and we never have her at our small parties. But at a crush—my dear Mrs. Candour, you know as well as I do how impossible it is to weed when you really want your rooms filled." And Bell understands her position to a nicety; gives back hatred for hatred, scorn for scorn, with interest; rewards Lucretia and Lucretia's mamma for each crush to which she is invited, on sufferance, by stabs such as only a woman living

in the debateable land between the half world and the whole has power to inflict.

She is a cousin by marriage of the Pascals, and the Prince Charming, with his wonted philosophic optimism concerning success, has always persisted in regarding her as the most innocent of human beings. Once or twice during the periods of submergence of which I spoke, it has indeed been in his power to throw out a stray rope or so on her behalf. And Bell, odd to say, has returned these acts by a certain substantial gratitude—opera tickets for which she had no better use; boxes of faded finery for the girls; during the last twelve months, trips to watering-places for Leah; and, finally, the capture of Jack Chamberlayne.

That Leah, with her beauty, her affection for money, and her perfectly "broad" notions as to ways and means, might have arrived at the same end, unassisted, is possible

—possible, but not likely. Jack, eight short weeks ago, never, on principle, opened his lips to a lady, or in any way frequented the hunting-grounds of decent society. Mothers looked at him in apathetic despair. Daughters called him “that hideous little monster,” and drew their skirts together as he passed. All classes of respectable money-hunters regarded the prospective hundred thousand pounds as already in the hands of the Philistines. But Bell, from that debateable standing-point of hers, thought differently, resolved upon and encompassed Jack’s rehabilitation by a coup de main, the ostensible machinery—horse-dealing.

Mr. Chamberlayne, at Scarborough for his health, had a thorough-bred Irish mare to sell. Mrs. Baltimore, at Scarborough for *her* health, was suddenly ordered horse-exercise—by the faculty. They met; they looked over the mare’s points, in each other’s company. “When I have to deal with a

gentleman," said Bell, giving Jack the fullest benefit of her blue eyes—"when I have to deal with a gentleman, I never employ either vet or dealer. You say the mare is sound, Mr. Chamberlayne. Tell me your price in two words, and the affair is settled."

And so it was—for poor Jack. From horse-dealing to tender friendship; from tender friendship for Mrs. Baltimore to tender friendship for her dearest friend, Miss Pascal; the gradations were easy. Not unversed in some other social dangers, Jack had literally no experience whatever to guide him amidst glaciers matrimonial. Jolly little dinners and suppers; boating parties; rides; every human duty, tie, or belief made a theme for ridicule. . . . What was there in all this to scare a man's conscience?—what to remind him that he had overstepped the sunny frontiers of Bohemia and was in a country where the word "to-

morrow" has a meaning? Jolly little dinners; unlimited champagne, of the best vintage; a scoff at love and lovers, at husbands and wives—and then an awakening, one fine morning, with a worse headache than his wont, and a remembrance that his signet ring reposed, in token of affiance, upon Miss Pascal's third finger! So was Jack Chamberlayne rehabilitated.

"We owe everything to you, Bell," says Colonel Pascal, pressing his cousin's hand as he leads her down Madame Bonchrétien's gas-illuminated, tawdrily-decorated staircase. "My dear child's early marriage to the man of her choice, a young fellow so estimable—estimable in every way—as Mr. Chamberlayne."

"And, if Mr. Chamberlayne will only live another twelvemonth, the possessor of a hundred thousand pounds," interrupts Bell, wickedly. I will do Bell Baltimore justice. She may be—she is—a finished actress, in

her own especial line. Hypocrisy, without aim or audience, is an exertion beyond her strength. "Jack is not estimable, and he is not the man of Leah's choice; but he is a very desirable parti, and I managed it. You are right, there. Well, you have done me more than one good turn in days gone by, and I am not fond of being in debt. Just that."

Bell sits, of course, beside Colonel Pascal, at the head of the table, and the dinner passes off brilliantly. Instantly upon the arrival of the fine London lady, with her airs, graces, band-boxes, and impertinence, Madame Bonchrétien sent to the nearest restaurateur for entrées. Désiré is in his newest buttons; the old ladies have put on their best caps, Deb and Naomi their rose-coloured sashes. Even Mrs. Wynch, much as she detests Colonel Pascal and all belonging to him, is in her snuffy ermine and cotton velvet. Bell herself is simply dazzling.

Her dress, an azure silk, a little the worse for a couple of seasons' wear, with soft lace ruffles at her wrists and throat, and a heart-breaking little entanglement of blonde and rose-buds perched coquettishly on the summit of her bleached locks. Beautiful, with Leah's blooming youth, with Naomi's chiselled features, so near, you could scarcely call her. But there is a fascination independent of, and beyond, girlish freshness, or perfection of outline. Bell Baltimore has studied the whole art of allurements from beginning to end, and practises it with the calm, untroubled certainty of an adept. She gives a side glance and looks down at Colonel Pascal. She openly commences a flirtation with her opposite neighbour, Lord Stair. Toothless old Mr. Macnamurdo, Churchwarden Pettingall, do not get through their dinners without an occasional look or word that makes their withered hearts feel young again.

"And this is what Leah Pascal, in time, may hope to arrive at." So rings the death-knell of love, purity, of all fairest might-have-beens, in Leah's soul. Smiles prodigal as those of *Tatters*, and but a shade less venial. A face patched over to perfection; with morality to match. Insincerity so perfect that one bows before it as a work of art, and a heart of steel. The last-finished product of decades of civilisation, a woman of fashion.

"You have become as silent as a school-girl, my dear," whispers Bell, affectionately encircling Leah's waist when the ladies have returned to the drawing-room. "The depressing effect of living among all these mummies, probably. Oh, my poor child, what men! Is Lord Stair—I mean to appropriate Lord Stair—the nearest thing to humanity the house contains?"

"Lord Stair is my very greatest friend, Bell," answers Leah, evasively. Not for thrice

Jack Chamberlayne's prospective wealth could she pronounce the name of Danton before Bell Baltimore. "Don't talk of appropriating Lord Stair, unless you want our friendship to be over."

"It would not be the first time that the same person has had his heart broken by us both," remarks Mrs. Baltimore. "Look at Mr Chamerlayne."

"That is quite another matter," says Mr. Chamberlayne's beloved. "If Jack were to admire twenty other people as much as he does me I don't think I could be jealous of him. Poor, good old Jack!"

Poor, good old Jack drops in, unexpectedly, before tea is over. During the whole past week Leah has persistently enlarged upon the necessity of his keeping aloof from the Rue Castiglione during the final forty-eight hours before the wedding. It is an established piece of etiquette that the

bridegroom should thus absent himself. . . . Every old lady in the house has told her so. . . . And the little sisters insist on having her to themselves at the last, and she is really not free from those horrible drèss-makers one moment during the day. The logical result of which persistence being that Jack has again turned wildly suspicious of Lord Stair; jealous, beyond cure of judgment, of every moment that Leah and Lord Stair spend together unguarded by his presence.

Much as he loves the girl—oh, poverty of language, that we must so often desecrate that word!—he distrusts her more; thereby, fool though he be, showing sagacity that might shame the reason of some better men. Her unwonted kindness during their drive to-day sent him away from the house, as I have said, intoxicated; before he had turned into the Rue de Rivoli he began to ask himself ugly questions on the score of

her possible motives. Mistrust does not require any very high or complicated mental process; and, little though Jack has seen of refined society, his experiences since he left off jackets have sufficed to teach him the meaning of Judas kisses. Once aroused, and neither cigars nor brandy could quiet the "monster begot upon itself, born on itself." Dressmakers, little sisters, etiquette—a nice pretext to put a man off with, etiquette! Jack broods fiercely over his imagined wrongs during his solitary dinner, rushes forth from his hotel the very second the meal is over, and enters Madame Bonchrétien's salon just in time to find Lord Stair murmuring pretty things into Miss Pascal's ear, on the sofa, and Bell Baltimore in a corner, virtuously playing besique with little Deb.

"You aim too high, Debbie." Bell sees Jack Chamberlayne, without uplifting her eyelashes, and improvises this small aside

for his benefit. "That is just the fault Leah makes, too. You children risk everything for double besique or sequence, and I—you see, Deb, score my little common marriage, twenty, and win. Oh! Mr. Chamberlayne, is it really you? How you startled me!"

Jack never feels himself more thoroughly at home than in Mrs. Baltimore's company—a doubtful compliment, perhaps, to Mrs. Baltimore! She can talk down to his level, while she makes him feel that he talks up to hers. She knows his world, masculine and feminine—she knows himself; save, perhaps, in some few honest corners beyond a Bell Baltimore's lights. Even with Leah frowning on him, it would be hard for Jack to remain long sullen under the influence of this syren's smiles. And Leah does not intend to frown on any man to-night, least of all on Jack. The presence of her own familiar friend fans the girl's latent coquetry—bitterly

miserable though she be—to white heat. When Danton comes (her feverish eyes watch the clock for him already) he shall find Lord Stair and Jack Chamberlayne, *both* at her feet. Her cheeks flush to their loveliest hectic—her spirits become wild. Not Bell, with all her Brighton gossip, her practised powers of amusing, can compete with Leah to-night. Jack grows more desperately in love than ever. He perches himself on a low stool about the third of a yard from her feet, and, jealousy and suspicion forgotten, looks up, with all the rapture of proprietorship, into her exquisite, animated face—Lord Stair still forming a modest third in the background. Colonel Pascal gazes at the picture of innocent happiness with parental pride; and Bell, neglected, begins to yawn behind her pocket-handkerchief.

“Leah,” cries little Deb, at this touching juncture, “may Naomi and I put on our

bridesmaids' dresses—just for a quarter of an hour? Naomi does so want to try our effect, and we will promise not to sit down; and you really *ought* to let Jack see how we look."

Leah objects—an unaccountable, sudden sharpness in her voice—but Jack interferes. "Why the dickens, at such a time as this, should the poor children not amuse themselves? Bridesmaids—love their little hearts! Let us see the bridesmaids' dresses, by all means. Anything to remind us of that thrice-blessed six o'clock ceremony next Wednesday."

"I hope we shall call it blessed this time next year," remarks Leah. However, she lets the children depart, Naomi rushing wildly, three steps at a time, Deb's poor little halting legs following as best they may, upstairs. Ten minutes later they return, transfigured from gawky, ill-dressed girls into angels, all white-and-rose and spotless gauze,

afraid to walk or breathe or sit, after the manner of angels.

“What we want, to show us off, is the bride!” cries Naomi, in a kind of exultation. “Stand up for a minute, Leah, just to try how we shall look.”

Leah is in simple white muslin to-night; some instinct of feminine friendship guided her, doubtless, in selecting the one dress dear Bell cannot venture to wear. A creamy gloire de Dijon rose, taken from the glass upon her dressing-table, lies amidst the ripples of her nut-brown hair.

“Yes, to be sure, Leah,” cries Jack, springing to his feet; “to please me—well, to please the children, then—stand up for a minute. Where is the use of false shame at this time of day?”

“False shame!” repeats Leah, slowly, and gives her lover a look—such a look of frozen indifference as any man but a Jack Chamberlayne must surely interpret right.

"Well, I never thought among my many sins that I should be accused of that."

Saying which she rises, Jack taking forcible possession of both her hands, and allows herself to be centrally placed, for the benefit of the company at large, with the angels behind.

"You want a veil—you want a veil to hide your blushes," cries Mr. Chamberlayne. "Ah, here is just the thing!" And seizing a lace antimacassar from from the back of a neighbouring chair, he throws it suddenly over her head. "Now, if we had only a parson handy, we would get through the ceremony at once and save papa the expense of the wedding dinner. By the Lord, we would!"

He draws Leah's cold left hand through his arm, adjusts an imaginary flower in his button-hole, smooths down his neck-tie, goes through the pantomime of producing a ring from his waistcoat pocket.

"I, John Frederick, take thee, Leah"——

He has proceeded thus far in the marriage ceremony before Leah can free her hand from his grasp. The children are in ecstasies, the old ladies, on tiptoe, watch with delight the frolics of our dear young Croesus.

"Take thee, Leah, to my wedded wife. To have and to hold"—— And then Jack stops abruptly. A footstep sounds on the stair, the drawing-room door opens; another second, and Danton has walked straight in amidst them all.

Leah's head is turned away, but the sudden quickening of her breath, the feeling of actual physical pain that contracts her heart, tell her the truth.



CHAPTER III.

“COME!”

MENTALLY Leah Pascal has rehearsed their meeting at least one hundred times during the past twenty-four hours, always tragically. Danton should find her passionately, loudly injured, or cold and tearless as stone; a Lady Macbeth or a Medea. He comes, and she is acting a farce with Jack Chamberlayne, an antimacassar over her head, a room full of indifferent men and women looking on. Is not the

yarn of human lives, as a rule, thus mingled — off the stage? Despair, death, in the soul, and externally the travestiments of a burlesque and spectators!

“M. Danton — this *is* fortunate,” cries Naomi. She does not love Danton ordinarily; but any man, any audience would be welcome to Naomi Pascal at this blissful crowning point of existence. “Leah is only got up you know, but Deb and I are real. With white kid gloves, and bouquets, and our bridesmaids’ lockets, this is exactly how we shall be on Wednesday.”

“How are you, Danton?” cries Jack, holding out a couple of fingers, good-humouredly. “Just in time to play us the Wedding March, eh? We have been following the new fashion in executions, Monsieur; getting *our* execution over, snug and quiet, and disappointing the public.”

Danton is livid; that ashen-grey colour to

which dark-complexioned men are apt to turn under the influence of sudden and violent emotion. But the muscles of his mouth, his voice—all that is within the controlling power of will—betray him not.

“You have done wisely, Sir.” So he remarks, in answer to Jack’s small pleasantry. “Wisely and well. On an occasion like Miss Pascal’s marriage many men must suffer. By keeping the spectacle private, we may hope at least that their pangs will be lessened.”

At the coolness of his tone, the composure with which he enters into Jack’s humour, every fibre in Leah’s frame thrills with passion. She snatches the covering from her head, flings it from her, and stands, with gaze averted from Jack Chamberlayne and the rest, but confronting *him*. Her eyes seem to have become black as night from the dilation of their pupils, her brow

is contracted, her lips are white. An expression of compressed, silent rage, such as I think only features of Hebrew origin can wear, deforms the whole youth and beauty of her face.

“You have the knack of—finding us travestied—M. Danton.” God, can this be her own voice, she wonders, that speaks so carelessly! “But practical jokes are our forte. Are they not, Jack?”

And then she turns, and without a blush meets all their looks—her lover’s, Lord Stair’s, Danton’s—all!

“By Jove, I don’t know what you mean by practical ‘jokes,’” cries Jack, putting on a long face. “You are coming, I hope, Monsieur, to see me turned off on Wednesday? Evening affair—special licence—dinner here, in the Rue Castiglione afterwards. Of course you have offered M. Danton a place at the mournful ceremony, my dear?”

"If I have omitted to do so before, I invite M. Danton now," says Leah, coldly, articulately. "Our friends are to meet at the English chapel in the Avenue Marbeuf, M. Danton, at six precisely."

"There will be four bridesmaids," cries Naomi, with effusion. "Deb and I in white and rose, as you see, and the two Sherringtons in blue——"

"And we have seen the cake," adds Deb. "Oh, such a beauty, M. Danton! As big as a card-table, with the corners off, and Cupid sitting on a heap of gold in the middle."

"There are temptations for you," says Jack, his hollow little face beaming. "If you want another, I have it—be best man. Oh, I am not joking at all, my love." This is in response to a flash he receives from his love's eyes. "I got a telegram from Smithett just before dinner, and he can't come—broken a couple of ribs by a fall down at

Newmarket. If M. Danton would not mind standing proxy?"

"Surely, Chamberlayne—ahem—you must have other friends in Paris, friends of older standing—ahem!" Thus Prince Charming, pompously, from the hearth-rug; Prince Charming, horrified at having a Bohemian medical student, who plays the piano, who gets his living no respectable person knows how, at his daughter's marriage.

"I accept the invitation conditionally," says Danton, pointedly addressing himself to Leah. "Before next Wednesday it may happen that I am some hundreds of miles away from Paris. If I am here"—a little pause; Leah's heart accentuates that pause with its fullest meaning—"I shall not fail to be at the English chapel, in the Avenue Marbeuf, at six."

"But that sort of answer will scarcely do for a best man, will it?" asks Bell in her

silvery tones. She rose while Danton spoke, has crossed the room in her gliding, noiseless way, and stands now close beside Miss Pascal's elbow. "Bridesmaids and best men must, surely, make up their minds, whatever the bride and bridegroom do, before the eleventh hour?"

"Whatever the bride and bridegroom do." As she utters these words with emphasis, Mrs. Baltimore's eyes meet those of Danton, and the gauntlet is thrown down between them. To a very large proportion of men Bell is irresistible. Others, while retaining their peace of mind personally, do fullest justice to her capabilities of conquest. To just a few she is repulsive. Danton is amongst these few, and Bell already knows it. At a glance he discerns the white-wash on her soul, as clearly as the rice-powder on her face; sees the finished woman of the world, the licensed seductress of fashion, in every fold of her clinging draperies, every

intonation of her trained voice; and ranks her—oh, how infinitely lower than any of those poor ballet-girls and chorus singers, his public appearance with whom has so scandalised the virtuous-minded inmates of Madame Bonchrétien's house!

"As I am positive to be in Paris," remarks Lord Stair, "and as I never change my mind"—he gives a quick look at Leah—"under any circumstances whatever, perhaps I might be considered an available substitute for Mr. Smithett?"

"Charming! charming!" cries Colonel Pascal, the eye of his imagination already on a paragraph in the *Morning Post*, wherein the delightful name of Lord Stair shall figure pre-eminent. "Really, Chamberlayne, I congratulate myself—your friend must excuse me—but I congratulate myself on Mr. — um — aw — Smithett's broken ribs."

"I don't congratulate myself at all," says

Jack, with his frank rudeness, and looking thunder-clouds at Lord Stair. "Smithett is one of my best friends, and a fellow of my own age, and a deuced good-looking fellow, too. Who ever heard of having a best man——"

"Old and ugly enough to be your grandfather," Lord Stair interrupts him with unruffled temper. "It is an anachronism certainly. Still, in a proxy, I think, grey hairs may be overlooked."

"And your hair is not grey, Lord Stair," cries Deb, fixing her terrible eyes on his Lordship's flame-coloured locks. "I heard Leah say the other day that hair like . . . like *that*!" remarks Deb, with delicate ambiguity, "never turned grey. Didn't you, Leah?"

The speech delights Jack back into good-humour.

"I have a great mind to take you with

us as travelling bridesmaid, Deb. You would do finely to amuse us on wet days, and that, when we begin to grow tired of each other."

"If you take a bridesmaid, you ought, in common fairness, to take a best man, too," says Lord Stair. "The whole system of wedding-touring wants radical change. Suppose you inaugurate the reformation, Chamberlayne! Make up a pleasant party of five or six people, and never get tired of each other at all. What do you say, Miss Pascal?"

But the question meets with no answer. Miss Pascal has moved abruptly away into the back drawing-room, and stands there, beside the piano; her head turned from every one save M. Danton, who has followed her, her face bent down over a heap of music she is hurriedly examining. Brief must be their colloquy, if colloquy they hold; few the words in which explanation is offered, or

passion vented. Mrs. Baltimore watches them stealthily. Colonel Pascal (upon whom an instinct of uneasiness has fallen with regard to Danton) shifts from one dandified foot to the other, passes his jewelled fingers through his hair, fidgets half way across the room—in another minute will be at his daughter's side.

"You have suffered, my poor love; you are suffering at this moment," whispers Danton. "Yes, Miss Pascal," he adds aloud, "the romance you want is here. I brought it down from my room a couple of days ago."

"Suffered! You have killed me," comes her answer in broken stifling accents. "You have killed me—and you presume to speak like this still!"

"I love you," is Danton's answer. "Throw me over, be true to me, as you will. I love you."

"Love?—Yes, papa, yes; M. Danton is

going to sing for us—You dare insult me with that word. I know *the truth*, Sir! Mr. Pettingall has told me the whole shameful truth.”

By this time Colonel Pascal has reached them. “It will oblige us infinitely, I am sure, if M. Danton will favour us with some of his very charming songs—the last occasion probably, Leah, my love, that you and Mr. Chamberlayne will have the pleasure of hearing them.”

“Let me petition, too,” cries Bell Baltimore, crossing to the piano. “Music is my passion, M. Danton—Leah, you have not introduced me to M. Danton—Italian songs above all, and I know that you sing Italian well!”

Danton smiles, looks flattered, and in the space of about a minute and a half has glided into the empty verbiage that in the world is called Art-talk with Bell. He is simply giving Leah time—time for the philtre con-

tained in that word "love" to enter her veins and lend her courage.

"And you *will* sing to us? Ah, how good, and I may choose—these are your songs, M. Danton—I may choose what we shall have, first?"

And Bell does choose, and Danton sings. He possesses a magnificent natural capacity, as we have seen; a voice rich in tone and compass, affluent in youth's full freshness. So far the task is easy. But be sure, without a tolerably strong will, a man cannot be put through a whole repertory of songs, now bravoura, now ballad, now Italian, now English—a man, I say, his heart torn by sudden anguish of disappointment, cannot sing any number of songs, at command, without the exercise of will quite beyond the average. Happily, Danton possesses this will. He shrinks not from a single note—not even from that upper C his enemies know. Ballad and bravoura, French, Italian,

English, he goes through it all like an artist, and brings what Bell herself would call her heart into her throat.

“You really must give me the name of that Italian barcarole, M. Danton?” He has quitted the piano at last, and Bell’s blue eyes are looking their softest into his. “I have no voice, unfortunately for myself, but I can just make noise enough when I am alone, with the doors well shut, to recall better things. ‘*Sulla poppa del mio*’— No, my wretched memory will never retain six consecutive Italian words unless you write them down for me.”

Reader, all things come to him who waits and has power to utilise his chances. During the past quarter of an hour, aye, during every bar he sung, Danton has been revolving one question in his mind—how to communicate with Leah. To speak to her, even in a whisper, is impossible, guarded, trebly guarded, as she is. To send her a note

through one of the servants of the house might be to compromise them both beyond redemption. And he must communicate with her at once, must see her alone to-night, or no more until he meet her as the wife of Jack Chamberlayne.

The opportunity of which he well-nigh despaired comes to him now through the agency of Bell Baltimore; Bell, who would give her two best diamond rings—the occasion forces me into strong language—sooner than see Leah faithless to her affianced lover. Moving into such a position that he can rest his hand upon the mantelshelf, and at the same time feel sure that no friendly eyes overlook his shoulder, Danton takes a notebook from his pocket, tears out a couple of its leaves, and at Mrs. Baltimore's command begins to write—but not the name of the Italian barcarole.

She crosses over quickly to his side—is Bell set upon poor Danton's conquest, or

what, that she should monopolise him so pertinaciously? "I am really ashamed to give you all this trouble, M. Danton, but that is the price people of talent have to pay. You have written me the title of the song? Now would you add the composer's name, and the publisher's? Thank you so much." And Bell stretches out her soft pink palm with a look and a smile that exceedingly few men would have strength of mind to resist.

Danton folds the piece of paper on which he has scribbled six or eight words in pencil, and transfers it to his waistcoat pocket. Afterwards, deliberately dotting every "i" and crossing every "t," he writes down upon the second leaf the name of the *bacchante* for Mrs. Baltimore, presents it to her with a bow, then returns to the piano, amidst bridesmaids and groomsmen and lovers and all, and addresses Leah.

"And here are the words—the last words

of the romance you asked me for, Miss Pascal." Clearly and aloud he speaks; Colonel Pascal, Lord Stair, Jack himself, may hear every syllable. "I had forgotten them till this moment."

And quick as thought the folded slip of paper is transferred from Danton's waistcoat pocket into Leah's hand. Bell Baltimore, not unversed in the art of surreptitious note-giving, watches the whole transaction under shelter of her fan, and arrives at her own conclusions.

Well, and the evening comes to a close. The weary farce is acted out, Jack Chamberlayne's adieu spoken, the final adieu before he shall meet his bride at the altar, and Leah, guarded to the last by Bell and by the children, gets to the quiet of her own bed-room and to liberty. Need I tell you with what trembling haste she locks her door, how eagerly her fingers uncloset upon

the paper that may be her warrant of life or death, with what blinded eyes she reads?

“In the Atelier, when the house is quiet to-night. Come.”

So run the “last words of the romance.” Oh insolence, in their altered position, that he should dare address her thus, demand an interview as a matter of right! Oh joy, that he is near, and that he loves her still! She flings the paper down amidst the gewgaws and trinkets that strew her dressing-table, she snatches it up to raise it to her lips. She pales with anger, she flushes with soft repentant tenderness. “In the Atelier, when the house is quiet to-night. Come.”

The request is an insult, yet she must needs accede to it, were it but to tell him so. To remain away would imply distrust in her own strength, belief in Danton’s. She will go, even at the risk of discovery; go, if only to say those five words “I love

you no longer," and so take leave of him, and of everything connected with the mawkish name of love, for evermore. And deciding thus, she holds the note forth for instant destruction in the candle ; watches it, cold and resolute, until its corners begin to curl above the flame ; then snatches away her hand, and with a passion of tears hides the paper in her breast. "Oh, my love—oh, my miserable broken life—oh, that I might die to-night, that he might feel the weight for ever of having killed me!"

She sits, her head clasped between her hands, while tears rain down her cheeks—scalding tears, such as only the first, selfish, inconsolable grief of youth can produce.

A discreet tap at the bed-room door makes her start guiltily. It is Mrs. Baltimore's maid with a request that Miss Pascal, if not too tired, will come down for a little fireside chat with her mistress before bed-time?

Fireside chat with Bell Baltimore—panegyrics on flounces, orange-flower wreaths, and Brussels veils, *to-night!* Well, if only to turn away suspicion, it must be gone through, like the rest of the hypocrisies that the next forty-eight hour holds in store. Leah bathes her eyes in cold water, rubs her pallid cheeks till they glow again, and in five minutes' time is standing at her friend's door, the conventional smiles, the conventional falsehoods ready on her miserable lips. So good of dear Bell to send for her . . . ah, and what a sweet, sweet wrapper—real Mechlin, of course? And the lining of that becoming rose-coloured taffetas! Now they can have one of their good old gossips, just as they used to have in Bell's dressing-room at Scarborough.

The good old gossips, in which the friends were wont to discuss the ultimate fate of Mr. Chamberlayne!

Mrs. Baltimore is in possession of the

state, or visitor's apartment of the Bonchrétien establishment. No meagre camp-bedstead, no curtainless windows are here. Silk-lined draperies, warm carpets, ormoulu and and looking-glasses abound. A wood-fire, piled half way up the chimney, blazes on the hearth. On the dressing-table is ranged a regiment of scent bottles, trinkets, ivory brushes; all the raw materials of war, without which a veteran coquette would no more travel than would an experienced general without gunpowder. Bell, herself, reclines in an arm-chair beside the fire, her delicate person swathed in embroideries and ribbons, her head denuded of its towering puffs, and with coils of blonde hair simply wound round it for the night. Novelists of the sterner sex talk of the midnight conferences when heroines appear before each other in tears, and their back hair. Experience of actual life informs us that women are as reticent of displaying the one as the

other. Leah has wiped away the traces of her tears, as of so many crimes. Bell has still ten pounds'-worth of M. Isidore's best workmanship round her head.

"You dear, extravagant old Bell, how nice you look—just like the heroine in a French novel! And what a room Bonchrétien has produced for you! You should see the den the children and I inhabit; no curtains, no carpet, no fire. But, to be sure, the Prince Charming gets us boarded, all three in a lump, for a hundred francs a-week."

"Poor dear Prince Charming," says Bell; "I declare only to look at his face does one good. He radiates with satisfaction."

"And gratitude to you, Bell, the saviour of the family. Ah, well, I hope poor Jack will feel the same kind of gratitude six months hence."

And with a sigh, too audible to be alto-

gether real, Leah draws up another easy-chair beside the hearth and sinks therein; precisely in such a position that the light of the fire falls, with searching brilliancy, upon her face.

Bell Baltimore watches her in silence. "If I were not assured of your happiness, Leah," she remarks, presently, "if I were not certain that your heart is as light as heart can be, I should say that you had been crying."

"And what if I have been crying?" says the girl, promptly. "What if I cry every night of my life, just now? You know me on the surface only, Bell. You don't give me credit for a single human feeling. Do you think it costs me nothing to leave those two dear children, and——"

"And your dear papa. Of course it must cost you infinite suffering to bid the Prince Charming good-bye! I ought to have remembered that when I spoke. What

a delightful person your friend M. Danton seems, Leah !”

The blow is struck quickly, with precision ; but Leah does not stagger by a hair's-breadth under the shock. “ M. Danton has a remarkably fine tenor voice,” she observes, with excellently assumed indifference to the subject.

“ And quite one of the handsomest faces I have seen. He reminded me, at once, of Guiglini (you are too young to remember poor Guiglini) ; just the same fine eyes and delicate line of profile.”

It is Leah's turn to be silent. Not remembering Guiglini, how can she be expected to enlarge on the beauty of his eyes or profile?

“ Much as I should dislike this boarding-house existence,” goes on Bell, “ there is one decided advantage in it—you are thrown with picturesque people, such as you would never otherwise meet.”

"People like Lord Stair, for instance," says Leah. Evidently the conversation interests her not, for she has to repress a yawn, and raises her handkerchief to her lips.

"Well, even Lord Stair is more picturesque in the Rue Castiglione than he would be in London. But I spoke of M. Danton. Out of a house like this, you would never get a chance of being in the same room with a person like M. Danton. And he is charming! Your father mentioned his circumstances to me, poor fellow; but of course that has nothing to do with talent. An artist is an artist. I can assure you, Leah, I quite enjoyed my evening."

The stiletto point finds its way where the straightforward dagger thrust was powerless. "He who ran might read that you enjoyed yourself, Bell! For my own part, I must say I thought you a little cruel. Considering your long lists of killed and

wounded, could you not be satisfied without the slaughter of one poor obscure victim, like M. Danton?"

"You mean that I laid myself out for M. Danton's conquest?" says Bell, with her chill smile. "Well, this is about the first time I have been accused of a weakness à la Maggie McDormond! I can understand most phases of mental depravity," she adds, lightly; "but that particular one—a woman stooping to accept notice from a man beneath herself—is beyond me."

The firelight quivers and dances on the faces of the two cousins, on Bell Baltimore who allured, on Leah Pascal who accepted, Jack Chamberlayne. Bell is upright, alert, watchful, the conscious virtues of a Cornelia on her cold blonde face! Leah's eyes are fixed upon the blazing embers, her hands lie listlessly on her lap, the expression of lassitude that follows any strong mental

excitement is visible upon her whole person.

“‘A man beneath herself.’ If I were sufficiently wide awake to argue, we would have that question out, Bell. I should like to know how you interpret the word ‘beneath.’ But I am really mortally tired to-night. When we were in the drawing-room I listened to all your voices as though I were in a dream, hearing rather than understanding.”

“You are thoroughly overwrought, Leah,” says Bell, with meaning. “And persons in just that kind of state have an unpleasant trick of falling seriously ill! If you are wise you will not stir from your own room to-morrow. One wants all one’s nerve to get through a wedding gracefully. And honestly and truly, you are looking frightfully ill, child. You have aged by three years since I saw you last.”

Leah not replying to the compliment,

Bell has to resume the burthen of making conversation unassisted, and for half-an-hour more carries it on without slackening speed. Dress, scandal, the delightful golden future that lies before Jack Chamberlayne's wife, the certain conquests and successes of next season's campaign—these are Bell's themes; not unwisely chosen! In a certain kind of shallow cleverness, a certain skin-deep knowledge of the weaknesses of human nature, very few women can surpass Bell Baltimore. At last the clock above the fire-place strikes one.

“And all my chances of beauty-sleep are over for to-night,” cries Leah, rising with a start. “Bell, if I look as plain as my best friends could wish on Wednesday, I shall have you to thank, remember. These ghostly vigils are a fatal preparation for dead white silks and a daylight complexion.”

Bell follows her to the door, and when

kisses have been exchanged, holds the girl's feverish hand in her own. "Leah," she whispers, "will you forgive me if I offer you one little bit of commonplace advice? I promise never to ask a question, never to go back to the subject while we live; but all my hardly-gained experience of the world makes it an absolute duty for me to speak."

"Advice—duty? I—I don't know what you mean, Bell," stammers Leah, changing colour painfully, and trying, with poor success, to smile. "The best advice you can give me is, to go to sleep as soon as possible."

"Yes, Leah, go to sleep; and even in your dreams refrain from listening to one more syllable of the *last words of the romance*. Good night, my dear."



CHAPTER IV.

IN THE ATELIER.

THE atelier is on the third floor ; a slip of a room, all outer wall and skylight, too hot for habitation in summer, too cold in winter, and mysteriously called by Bonchrétien "the Observatory." In the days when Madame's resources did not enable her to rent the entire house, a photographer used to carry on his business in this room, and the smell of collodion clings, even yet, to the walls. The smell of collodion will

be likely to cleave to Leah Pascal's remembrance while she lives!

Precisely as midnight strikes, M. Danton quits his chamber: Bonchrétien, muffled up in an old grey camisole, nightcap on head, sees and wishes him good night, a quarter of an hour later, as he stands, a cigarette between his fingers, at the half-open door or the atelier.

"Bon soir to my dear M. Danton—stargazing as usual! Ah, my poor friend, you discover St. Pierre to pay St. Paul! As much wisdom can be had of our pillow as of our brains." And sending him a little kiss from her finger-tips, Madame, without a suspicion, shuffles away; economical even of time, muttering her prayers as she goes to her roost under the leads.

Twelve o'clock. Half-past twelve. One. Danton listens as the city clocks strike the half-hours, smokes cigarette after cigarette, occasionally gives vent to his impatience by

noiselessly pacing up and down the narrow floor of the atelier. At last, when considerably more than an hour has gone by, he is rewarded by seeing the glimmer of a light upon the opposite wall—another minute, and a white-clad figure glides rapidly across the open space at the summit of the stairs, and passes into the room occupied by little Deb and Naomi Pascal.

To gain her own apartment, which is at the extreme end of the corridor, Leah will be forced to pass the door of the atelier. Let her purpose to give him an interview or no, she must, of necessity, find herself once more face to face with Danton alone. "The last words of the romance" will be spoken, and in quite plain tones, with no softening down whatsoever of unpalatable truth. Never was man less disposed for euphemistic gallantry of any kind than is Eugene Danton at this moment.

She leaves the children's room, walks

slowly, with a face set and white as stone, along the corridor. The door of the atelier is in shadow ; the atelier, itself, illumined in part only by the moon shining through the skylight. Leah carries a candle in her hand, so Danton, unseen himself, can watch her clearly. She reaches the door—pauses : then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, pushes it back upon its hinges and enters. They stand, and for several seconds look at each other without a word. Leah speaks first.

“You asked me to come, and I am here. It must be an intense pleasure for you to hear how much I hate you that you should still throw yourself in my way !”

I have said that her face is white, and set as stone. As she addresses him, a spot of colour mounts on either cheek ; the red glow of passion kindles in her deep-set eyes.

"Hate is not the word," she goes on, her voice sinking to a whisper, yet gaining in power as it sinks. "I loathe you! I loathe myself for having put it in your power to make me suffer."

Still Danton stands before her, silent, and tolerably collected; the cigarette, which up to the moment of her entrance he was smoking, between his fingers. At the sight of that cigarette, Leah's wrath waxes fiercer and fiercer. Women judge by such trifles—alas! their lives are made up of such trifles! Any man, lover or not, who had to wait an hour and a half in the cold, would take out his tobacco-pouch as naturally, as mechanically, as he would draw breath. To Leah that cigarette is a crime; an added insult, deadly and premeditated, to all the injuries that Danton has already wrought her.

"Do you know, Sir," so she breaks forth next, "in spite of your airy indifference,

that I look upon you as the very greatest scoundrel in the world? I am only a girl. My words cannot hurt you. I wish that I were a man to make them plainer."

"Do you know," says Danton, speaking for the first time, "that though you have broken your faith to me shamelessly, tossed me aside like an old glove, I love you better than I ever loved you yet at this moment?"

"Love? The word from your lips is an insult. Why, but for you——" And then she falters, breaks down, half turns as if to go—but remains.

"But for me, you would be a vast deal happier than you are, Leah. That is the truth, is it not? My poor little Leah—it must have been so hard for you to suffer, with no one at hand to give you consolation."

"I have many people to give me con-

solation, I thank you, M. Danton. If I have suffered, and I have!—I am not ashamed to say how much your treachery has cost me—the wound will not last for life, be quite sure. I am not the sort of woman to break my heart because one more man in the world has proved himself a villain.”

“You are not the sort of woman to break your heart for any cause,” says Danton. In the days to come it may be that he will think twice of that remark of his. “The human beings, if any such exist, who break their hearts, are those who love. And it is not in you to care two straws for any man. Why, if you had liked me,” he goes on, warming, “as many women like for eight days, knowing that at the end of eight days ’twill be past, you would have defended me when I was absent, have given me the chance, at least, of self-defence.”

"I—I presume you know that I have heard of your marriage," she answers; but in a voice that falters more and more. Already the ground seems slipping from beneath her feet; Danton's stronger will, Danton's absolute truth, begin to assert themselves.

"And what if you have? You know, can know nothing about the circumstances of my life, past or present. The promises of love you made last night in the Tuileries gardens were to *me*, without conditions. An accident that blackened my life a dozen years ago—the mere fact of my marriage—is altogether beside the question of our love for each other."

"The fact of your marriage . . . beside the question!" she stammers. Odd contradiction! Though the boldness of his speech shakes every prejudice Leah has to its foundation, she feels her pride unwounded. Many a love speech from the lips of her affianced

husband has humiliated her more. "If you are going to speak in this *awful, irreligious* manner," putting down her candle on the solitary table the room contains, "I shall feel it my duty to leave you at once."

"You will remain here, Miss Pascal," says Danton firmly, "until we have had our last say to each other out."

"Our last say," she repeats, looking at him with vaguely wistful entreaty in her eyes.

"Yes, our very last; as regards explanation, at all events. Probably our last of any kind in this world. Well, we shall not be able to finish it in a dozen, or in twice a dozen words—and you are too thinly dressed to be here, my poor love." He comes to Leah's side abruptly, and throws his arms round her. "Why, you are trembling, and your hands," taking one of them as he speaks in his, and holding it close, "are

on fire. What have you been doing with yourself since you left the drawing-room?"

"I—oh, M. Danton, how frightfully wrong all this is! I will not stay with you one moment longer—I have been talking to my cousin, Mrs. Baltimore."

"A good counsellor, on my word—Mrs. Baltimore! Will the day ever come, Leah, when I shall see you tortured out of nature, artificial in look and word, plastered, soul and body, an inch thick in paint, a woman of fashion, like Mrs. Baltimore? Or so much lower, as your capacity for better things is greater!"

"You will see me, as you see poor Bell, as you see all women, much as life and as men's selfishness make us," says Leah, with bitterness, and breaking as she speaks from Danton's arm. "Take my case, as you are so deeply interested in it. Look at my papa;" her tone, her face, supply the place

of adjectives. "Look at my future husband ! Look at my best friend, my lover, as he called himself yesterday ! If at Bell's age I have turned out half as well as she has, it will be a great surprise to myself, M. Danton. That is all I have to say."

Her warmth almost rekindles Danton's hopes. When a woman extenuates herself to the man who loves her, she betrays this much, at least, that she values his respect ; just the very next step to valuing himself. "Do you mind remaining here for a few seconds, without me, Miss Pascal, long enough merely for me to go to my room and back ? And for precaution," suiting the action to the word, "I will extinguish the candle. The moon gives us more than enough light to talk by. Now, don't stir an inch till I return."

And with this Leah finds herself alone ; bewildered, stunned, conscious, as far as reason can inform her, that Danton is wrong,

she right ; yet feeling, through some intuition acuter than reason, that he stands on loftier ground than she, that her best chance of happiness, even yet, rests on obeying him ! At the end of about a minute and a half he returns, loaded ; his warm travelling plaid to be pinned (he pins it himself) round her shoulders, a tiger skin for her feet. On one side of the atelier is a kind of recess or embrasure, wherein, no doubt, stood formerly a broken column, or other piece of photographic property. It is furnished with a low broad ledge, just spacious enough to form a resting-place for one person. And here Leah is placed. I employ the passive voice intentionally : what action of Leah Pascal's but must be passive so long as she is with Danton ? Her delicate Jewish features show fair in the moonlight above the opaque shadows of the plaid ; her diamond rings sparkle, in green and ruby fire, that contrasts and yet assimilates curiously

with the mottled richness of the tiger skin upon which her fingers rest. Danton takes up his position at her feet. In novels, Leah has read, probably some hundred times or more, of lovers thus placed. In real life the experience is new to her. Imagine a Lord Stair, or a Jack Chamberlayne—imagine any British admirer she has had, and the list is long—planted, Turk-fashion, on a bare parquet, yet not looking ridiculous! To Danton, with his artistic southern face, his entire absence of self-consciousness, the position seems at once natural and full of ease. He leans his head back against the opposite side of the embrasure, and gazes at her.

“You are the prettiest woman I ever saw in my life, Miss Pascal. I don’t believe I have paid you many compliments hitherto, so you must excuse this broad one.”

“Compliments are not the road to my favour,” says Leah, sharply. She is palpi-

tating with sudden pleasure. No assurance of his love could have affected her to half the same extent as this unexpected appeal to vanity. "I have heard too many of them, I can assure you, not to know their worth."

"I was not thinking of your favour," says Danton. "As you sat there, partly in shadow, yet with the light upon your face and hands, I *felt* your beauty, all at once, as one might feel a wild new chord in music, struck without prelude. I will never recur to the objectionable subject again, if you desire it."

She smiles, in spite of herself; that sweet, half-mournful smile that deadened his reason from the first, and Danton in a second has approached nearer, is holding her hands in his.

"Before I begin my explanation, Leah, my history rather—such a history as it is—say that you were in earnest last night? Tell

me that, however the remaining thirty or forty years of our lives may be passed, for a couple of hours or so you cheated yourself into thinking that you loved me?"

"Your question does not deserve an answer, M. Danton. Cheated myself into thinking! If I had not been too sincere, too foolishly, fatally in earnest, should I ever have gone through the hours of horrible torture I did last night? Why, since I was born," Leah's eyes suffuse with self-pity, the most genuine, always, of her emotions, "I never suffered one quarter what I have done since I heard the truth about you."

"And if you had not heard 'the truth,' as you call it, you believe that you would have remained faithful to your word—would have deliberately chosen poverty and myself, instead of Mr. Chamberlayne and riches?"

Leah shifts uneasily from his gaze. This question that Danton has put so plainly was asked her by her own conscience, not once,

but a score of times, during the tortured watches of the night. The knowledge of his marriage has stabbed her pride, has crushed, and at the same time brought forth, whatever genuine aroma of love was latent in her fancy for him. Has it really influenced her fate? Did she ever absolutely purpose to break off her engagement to Jack Chamberlayne, put aside the purple and fine linen of affluence, and step forth into the desolate world of poverty, as Danton's wife?

"Considering our position towards each other, would it not be more delicate for you to leave that question unasked, M. Danton?" So, at length, she replies. Were Bell Baltimore acting as prompter, the words could scarcely be better chosen. "In meeting you here to-night I have sufficiently forgotten what I owe to myself—and others. You might have the forbearance to ask no more."

"I have no forbearance at all," exclaims Danton. "I am selfish in this matter, through and through, thinking of myself and of the years that lie before me"—this with an involuntary sadness in his voice—"not of you. Leah, give me your hand, so—and tell me, before you hear a word of my explanation, that for about one hour-and-a-half you believed you loved me?"

"Believed I loved you! Ah, heaven, that you can look back and doubt my sincerity!"

And Danton presses for no other answer.





CHAPTER V.

THE LAST WORDS OF THE ROMANCE.

“A WELL-KNOWN French writer,” says Danton, “classifies wedded happiness, neatly, French fashion, under four heads: ‘Acquaintance, three weeks; love, three months; war, three years; toleration, thirty years.’ My experience fell short of the stage of war by just three days. I married Madeleine Frere on October the fifth, and on January the second, as a kind of new year’s gift, perhaps, I don’t know

whether she bore the season in mind, she gave me back my freedom, a score or two of my own love letters, and a locket containing my photograph. Other jewelry, of a more directly marketable value, she carried with her, by instinct, I verily believe, rather than calculation. Madeleine could no more resist the magnetism of rings and bracelets than can the insects on a summer night withstand glare. Until the singed wings are powerless to flutter more, the moth goes back to the candle; until the frail, sordid heart lay still in death, Madeleine craved feverishly, ceaselessly, for the baubles which had been her ruin.

“She was tall, my Leah, somewhat above your stature, erect, fair of skin, though dark-eyed, and with the divinest look of soul upon her lips and brow that ever shone from woman’s face. Her hair and yours might be silk cut from the same piece, unless, indeed, hers was endowed with one

shade more of gold. I am not sure about that. To look back across eleven years would give a shade more gold to most things—and it is eleven years exactly since Madeleine Frere became my wife.”

“Eleven years,” repeats Leah, slowly. “Why you were a child, a schoolboy, when you married, then?”

“I was an undergraduate at Oxford, a theological student—ah, you may well look surprised!—with a fine fat midland living before me as the final goal of my ambition.”

“A fine English living, M. Danton? You?”

“Computed value, eighteen hundred a year, excellent glebe, good society, and two packs of hounds in the neighbourhood. It was the living Madeleine Frere married, not me, as I discovered too late. Well, before coming to Madeleine at all, I ought to tell you in a dozen words what my own youth

had been . . . But are you warm enough, my love? Pull the plaid closer round your throat—there! And now turn, so that I may not lose one hair's breadth of your face. I am greedy of looking at your beauty, Leah—the chances, in spite of my explanation, are so widely against my being the possessor of it on this side of the grave.”

Leah's eyes glisten in the moonlight; her face softens to as lovely a tenderness as it wore last night under the chestnut trees. “If I have condemned you too hastily, you—you will at least forgive me, M. Danton? Oh, what a difficult thing it is to know what duty is!”

“Especially when duty and inclination are ready to clasp hands. Leah,” he proceeds abruptly, “you will marry Mr. Chamberlayne on Wednesday. The story I am going to tell you will not hinder that, although it may serve, in other ways, as

a homily, perhaps. You will marry Mr. Chamberlayne on Wednesday."

She makes no answer, only bows her head, in a graceful little pose of abandonment upon her breast, and sighs. The jewel-clasp at her throat sparkles for one moment like the keen eye of some living creature, then sinks again into obscurity with the sigh.

"And still I am fool enough, as I look at you, to hope—yes, with certainty staring me grim and unrelenting in the face. Don't grudge me my half-hour's folly—'twill be paid for dearly enough some day, depend upon it. Now to my story.

"My father, Leah, died when I was a child of eleven; my mother five years later. At sixteen, here in Paris, I stood absolutely alone in the world, with a couple of hundred francs, and a schoolboy's knowledge of classics and mathematics standing between me and starvation. How was I to live? My mother had supported us both by giving English

lessons since my father's death, and out of her poor earnings had contrived to send me as a day scholar to the College of St. Barbe. But of what use was my education? How could a friendless lad of sixteen convert classics and mathematics into bread? I was too fine to be an errand boy, too proud to beg, fitted, as it seemed, for nothing unless it were a plunge from one of the bridges into the Seine, and then the Morgue!

"Carrying out these ideas, on a certain winter's night, as I sauntered, chill and solitary, along the Quai Voltaire, a girl, about three years older than myself, accosted me; laying a little not over clean hand upon my shoulder as she spoke. 'You regard the water too much, my child,' she said, kindly. 'I used to do it once myself—pah!' with a shudder; 'get pretty black notions by that practice, I can tell you. Now just come with me, and I will show

you things better worth looking at than this slimy bed.' She was the daughter of one of the property-men at the Variétés, herself a chorus-girl at another smaller theatre, and—well, not a person to whom you or Mrs. Baltimore would care to speak. But she was my salvation."

"And you loved each other," remarks Leah, coldly. "Fine disinterested conduct, from *persons of that sort*, must naturally end in one stereotyped way!"

"Well, yes, we loved each other," answers Danton. "And what is more, we love each other still. It was my poor Annette, now the mother of half-a dozen children, who sent me my fruit and flowers yesterday. Did I not say 'twas well you should not know through what hands those roses had passed? Annette and her children are the scandalous characters with whom my friend, Mr. Pettingall has seen me in the Bois de Boulogne on a Sunday."

"Mr. Pettingall thinks like the rest of the world," cries Leah, whose code of social prejudice is narrow as the Prince Charming's own. "This is really not a narrative to which I can listen with sympathy, M. Danton."

"I am sure that it is not, Miss Pascal. But you see, if I were to tell you a history of silks and satins, and transcendental virtue, the moral might be fine—but it would not be the history of my life!

"Annette, I repeat, was my salvation. At the age I speak of, sixteen, I scarcely looked older than other children of twelve. I had lived with my mother from the day of my birth until her death, and some lingering aroma of her companionship seemed to cling to me, long after I was left to buffet alone with want and despair upon the streets of Paris. Annette got me a little place in the theatre where she worked, my salary

about enough to find me in dry bread; and helped first by one of those poor artists, then another, I contrived to live, the Seine and the Morgue forgotten, for more than a twelvemonth: not the unhappiest twelvemonth of my life. Then came a change of fortune—abrupt, overwhelming. An uncle upon my mother's side lost his son, a youth at college, destined for holy orders—I mean for the grand family living in the midland counties—and I, the only other representative of the new generation, was remembered. My uncle found me out, here in Paris, snatched me, to use his own expression, as a brand from the burning, and sent me for a couple of years to a public school, 'to make an Englishman of me;' then to a tutor's in the neighbourhood of London, to be prepared for Oxford.

"The tutor was facile, as tutors to lads of tolerable prospects are apt to be. Our hours of work over, and we were free,

following the tutor's example, to run up to town and frequent whatever society, taste whatever pleasures suited us best. He had six pupils at the time, and four out of those six went to the mischief, the brand snatched from the burning among them! Unhappily, while the rest only ruined themselves by fashion, for the time being, the young fool Eugene Danton, contrived to hang a millstone round his neck for life. When I entered Oxford I was formally engaged to Madeleine Frere. On the day I was twenty-one she became my wife.

"My uncle was furious, threatened to make me the beggar he had found me, and to send me back to what he was pleased to call 'my perdition' in Paris. Then Madeleine, in a happy inspiration, having thrown herself at his feet, he softened. What man, young or old, could she not soften when she chose? Nothing was to be said against the girl personally. She was of decent birth

and antecedents, beautiful, passionately attached to her husband—to me! As I had chosen to make a fool of myself by marrying at all, it was a subject for wonder, perhaps, considering my character, that I had not chosen worse. And then, Leah, came that ‘three months’ love’ of which the Frenchman writes.”

“The three months’ love of which, after all these years, and frail and sordid though your Madeleine was, you can scarcely bring your voice to speak of!” exclaims Leah, bitterly. “Ah, to command infatuation like that, the worse a woman is, the better her chance. And then men speak to us of their ideals!”

“It is a subject we may as well not discuss now,” says Danton, a little gravely. “Madeleine was beautiful, and I—a fool. The history, in six words, of a good many love matches before and since. However that may be, the duration of the ‘infatua-

tion' was short. Before we had been married a month, the train was already laid that should divide us, needing but the chance spark, that opportunity is never slow of bringing, to fire it.

"I am telling you of facts only, Leah. The night wears on. I will not rob you of the sleep you need so sorely by one word more of detail than is needed. Before Madeleine had been my wife a month, I confided to her a secret, at that time more important to me than all the empires in Europe, and in return received . . . a blank frozen look of contempt, a curl of the exquisite lip, an answer which, basely commonplace though it was, burnt itself into my recollection for ever.

"Doubts — vacillation? For my secret was no more than this, Leah, that I had become convinced of my own unfitness to be a teacher of spiritual truths to others. And pray what mattered this? Did half the

clergymen going believe what they preach from their pulpits? Were lawyers sincere—or doctors? Was any one sincere, for the matter of that! Unless I wished her to think that she had been cruelly duped, that she had married a man devoid alike of brain and principle, my lovely sympathetic Madeleine desired, the flush of sordid passion on her face, that I would never talk such trash as ‘incurring beggary for conviction’s sake’ in her presence. People without fixed opinions might be very admirable in their own conceit; but fixed opinions were the things that *paid*. I had not the right, morally, if it came to such grand talking, to ruin her, whatever I might do as regarded myself.

“In a word, she had married the living in the midland counties, value eighteen hundred a year—not me. Her anger, now that I can view it from a just perspective, was natural. What were abstract questions,

nice perplexities, abhorrence of moral dishonesty, to a creature whose world was comprised in silk dresses, trinkets, a visiting list and a carriage! But then, at one-and-twenty, and an enthusiast, my disappointment was pretty much what a man's might be who should find himself tied, soul and body, not to a living woman, but a corpse. Madeleine, with her radiant hair, (the shade of yours, my Leah), and her eyes and lips, was a corpse, livid, corrupt, the moment you touched her soul. And it was not in me then, or at any time in my life, to love, as some men can, the outward shell of a woman, leaving heart and intellect alone. I answered her; the fire that was in me piercing through words I vainly strove to render temperate. And in that hour—aye, as we stood there, face to face, I believe her determination of leaving me was taken. The temptation had existed already." Even in the pallid moonlight Leah can see how

Danton's cheek becomes a shade more pale. "But the prospective midland living had counterbalanced it. On such slender threads is the destiny of human lives balanced ! Perdition staved off by the mere prospective contemplation of a midland living, with glebe worth so much, and good society, and a couple of packs of hounds in the neighbourhood !

"One of the men with whom I had read at the facile tutor's, a Lord ——, well, let his name alone, Lord Lucre, we will call him, had long admired Madeleine ; in the days before I ever knew her, as I learned afterwards. This man, two or three years older than myself, was, at heart, a cynic of fifty, a sceptic, believing only in the fact that nature had endowed him with certain capacities for enjoyment, and fortune placed it within his means to gratify them at will. And he understood Madeleine to perfection : by natural affinity, I suppose ; he had not

brain sufficient for fine discrimination of character. No fine attentions did he waste on her, none of the sentimental clap-trap by which some cleverer men might seek to win a woman from her allegiance! He offered her from the beginning—Bracelets, of solid eighteen-carat gold, possessing a certain fixed market value; and no other eloquence was needed.

“On the evening when you essayed your diamonds for my benefit,” goes on Danton, “you wore a brown silk dress, my Leah, with yellow ribbon in your hair, and a bunch of violets at your breast. Do you think every smallest detail of that scene is not graven on my heart for ever? Well, as I entered the room, as you turned, a jewel-case in your hand, and looked at me, all I saw was Madeleine. The first gift of value that she got from my lord came anonymously, and in her pleasure over its reception, pure pleasure over the bauble uncon-

nected with the possible sender, she looked as you looked with Mr. Chamberlayne's diamonds in your hand. 'Eugene, to think that any one should be so generous! A bracelet, set with all these rich diamonds for me.' I was musing of her voice, her face, of a hundred memories your likeness to her had stirred, when Deb, you may remember, told me I looked like Lazarus. From this time forth Madeleine's mysterious presents continued to arrive steadily. At last I discovered, what every one in Oxford knew before me, the donor's name, and insisted, peremptorily, upon the whole of the jewels being returned, and the intimacy broken off.

"Madeleine listened to me quietly. 'What you say is well said, Eugene.' This, or something like this, was her answer. 'I should respect you less if you could endure to see me wearing ornaments that should have come from your hand, not a stranger's. I

will return my lord his presents. I will swear never to speak to my lord again, on one condition—that you will not utter another syllable about your “conscientious scruples” in matters of faith while you live. Surely this is a trifling concession for you to make?’ ”

“Then I say that she had no woman’s heart within her breast,” cries Leah. “A true woman would sooner die than see the man she loved depart, by half-an-inch, from principle !”

Reader, is this pasteboard or real? A week, four-and-twenty hours ago, would not Leah Pascal, placed in the same position, have spoken in Madeleine’s very words? I, who write her history, know not. Love’s transformations are rapid. Twenty-four hours of the passion, in its essence, will suffice to change clay to gold, uplift us out of ourselves to the level of that which we love as though by miracle. And to nearly all

of us 'tis given to feel noble, vicariously. Nearly all of us have moral insight sufficient to pierce through the frivolous motives, the sordid casuistry of a weaker sister.

“Madeleine spoke simply and unconsciously as she felt,” replies Danton. “One merit, if merit it may be called, she possessed to no common degree—transparency. She was literally too shallow, both of brain and heart, to be anything but transparent! Would I, or would I not—just before she packed up my lord’s trinkets—give her this promise, make the ‘trifling concession’ of enduring an existence which should be one monstrous out-crying living lie from that day forth until I died?”

“It was a moment of agony to me, Leah, such as no actual after disgrace had power to inflict. It is hard for a man to avow that he has been ever minded, Judas-like, to sell his own soul, and still—as Madeleine stood

there, in her slender delicate beauty, her soft eyes fixed on me, the flush of excitement on her cheeks, well—for one single, shameful instant, I must confess to you that I hesitated. She held what to a lad of one-and-twenty is more than life, she held my honour between those little trembling white hands. I thought of the world, of the place given to successful charlatanism in its ranks, of the midland living, of my duties, my sermons. And then—then the darkest moment, the worst temptation of my life, passed away from me,” exclaims Danton, “and I answered her. There were other ways of advancement besides the pulpit. So I tried, indirectly, to soften my resolution. The education I had received might possibly be turned to account in science better than in theology. My inclination tended towards science. Five years’ work in the London hospitals, and as a surgeon——

“‘Thank you for the prospect,’ cried Madeleine, turning from me grandly. And make no mistake about it, Leah! At that instant she felt grandly; felt that I was the impostor, she the victim. ‘Try all the professions, one after the other, and see the fine fortune, the position you will realise by them. As to my having faith in you! How am I, how is anyone, to believe in a man who does not believe in himself?’

“The logic was unanswerable: I made no attempt to dispute it. How shall one argue, on a matter of conscience, with a human creature in whose organisation conscience has no place? Of what Madeleine could taste, handle, above all wear, she could speak; oftentimes with a fluent, original little smartness that had charmed me. Of the inner life, its doubts, sorrows, consolations, she knew less than the man born blind knows of colour. You may convey images

to the blind by analogy. The smell of violets, the hush of a summer night will give him some idea, if not ours, of purple-blue. Madeleine possessed literally no faculty that could lift her beyond the teaching of her own five senses. As the wife of a midland rector she might, had fate been kind to her, have lived out her span of days a contented Pharisee, and have merited any amount of tombstone eulogy hereafter. Let virtue be lucrative, and she was the very last woman breathing to be led astray by the roses and raptures of the other side. Brought face to face with poverty, and she made for riches as a starving man makes for food ; instinctively, untroubled by moral misgivings or questioning of any kind.

“ We said our last words to each other on a certain dismal January morning. The streets of Oxford, I remember, were dark with sleet and fog. By six o’clock that

night I found myself alone!—dishonoured, as the world said and as I then thought—rid, I know now, of the perpetual temptation to dishonour, the degrading influence of a woman to whom money was the supreme good, and honesty, independence, truth, all, my Leah, that makes this life of ours worth living for, dross.”

Danton pauses, and, shrinking under his steady gaze, Leah bows her face. The degrading influence of a woman to whom money was the one supreme good! What is her supreme good? How came those diamonds on her fingers? At what altar will her spirit “stand passive, while the flesh is sold,” eight and forty hours hence?

“Madeleine was punished, depend upon it,” falteringly at last her lips give the answer that she knows he looks for. “Women are brought up to hate poverty. They don’t hold their fate in their hands as

men do—but be quite sure they are punished. Not a woman who sells her soul for a price but is tortured for it, even on this side the grave.”

“Leah, my poor little love, don’t defend the position. I know as well as you know what you feel. Don’t pain yourself or me, by putting it into words. Madeleine acted—according to her lights, we will say—and I was left free to work out my scheme of existence by what pattern I chose. Free in a world from whence all the fairest possibilities of human life had been blotted out, as far as I was personally concerned, for ever.

“Well, Leah, the conclusion of my story can soon be told. I worked out my scheme, by my own pattern, and now, at thirty years of age, am—what you see me. My hair fast turning grey, and no particular certainty as to how I shall pay for my dinner the week after next. When my uncle first

heard of my intention to abandon orthodoxy and the family living with it, he believed honestly and sincerely that I had lost my senses. Grief over my wife's misconduct must have turned my not over-strong brain. Men thus circumstanced not unfrequently take to stimulants, conceive disgust towards the objects of their former ambition. So said the 'eminent mental practitioner' whom he consulted as to my case. When at length he discovered that I was neither mad nor drunk, he behaved like a gentleman; so much I must say for him; made me a present of a couple of hundred pounds, hoped if I had a spark of gratitude in me, that I would not disgrace the family openly, and requested, with an earnestness that touched me, that he might never look upon my face again. At the end of another six months he died, and enormously to the surprise of every one, of myself most of all, a further sum of one thousand pounds was

left in his will 'to my nephew, Eugene Danton, who, with all his other vices, is not a hypocrite.'

"These twelve hundred pounds are, have been, rather, my fortune, a colossal one coming to me at the time they did, and with my disposition of mind. I went to London, I worked, I spent five years in the hospitals.

"At last, at six-and-twenty years old, I found myself with my face once more set in the direction of affluence. A West-end doctor, a celebrated specialist, wanted a partner, and having known something of me at Bartholomew's, offered to take me into his house; a chance as regards money that does not fall to one young surgeon, without either interest or genius, out of a thousand. Well, and Madeleine's theory proved true. People without fixed opinions may be very admirable in their own conceit, but fixed opinions are the things that pay. I found,

as the day approached for me to sign the deed of partnership, that I was no more suited for a May Fair specialist than for a midland rector. An unctuous air of mystery, a solemn Tartuffe-face to show through a brougham window, the whole art of pressing woman's hand, unbounded charlatanism, in short—these were the qualifications needed of me; the qualifications that end in a house in Eaton Square, and a splendid balance at one's bankers. And I had them not.

“The partnership fell through, as my preparation for the church had done, and a fact exceedingly useful for a man to know impressed itself at the same time upon my mind. I was not destined for riches, not for popularity, not for what is called social success of any kind or degree.

“What was I destined for? In the first place for work; as without it I had neither food nor drink; in the next for work I could believe in, were such to be found.

Impossible to disbelieve in the expediency of setting fractured bones or removing shattered limbs, provided the necessary art has been learnt to a man's best. I did not feel that in the London hospitals I had learnt surgery to my best. Two or three years in Paris, given exclusively to one class of labours, might, I thought, enable me to pass the remainder of my days as a bone-setter with decent satisfaction to myself and profit to others. And this is why you see me here. I earn just francs enough to pay Madame Bonchrétien for my food and shelter. My friends are the old ones of the theatre, who stood between me and the Morgue when I was a child. My hopes,—no, I will not speak of these. Since I have known you, my hopes, my projects, all that concerns my future life, are changed."

"And Madeleine? You—you have heard of your wife recently, they say, and she is well."

"Aye, well indeed—her sorrows and her

sins alike ended. Mr. Pettingall told you, doubtless, how a letter of inquiry written by her fell, through singular accident, into his possession? In spite of all that was past and gone, Leah, that letter smote my heart. If Madeleine had had friends, money, health, *anything* in the shape of prosperity remaining, I knew she would not have remembered me. All bitterness against her, all resentment of the wrong she had wrought me, had died years before; and holding none of the world's opinions as to what might or might not be dignified conduct for a man in my position, I obeyed her wishes at once, and went to London.

“I found her alone, penniless, in the last grasp of disease; a homily upon earthly vanity such as I, for certain, could never have preached, had I attained to the pulpit of the coveted midland living. On the day she left me, that January morning, in Oxford, she was in the meridian of youth and health, flushed

with the pride of life and with her own beauty. I found her faded, unsightly—as even the fairest woman can become from the reflection of the soul within—unrepentant to an extent that, if I had been less personally interested, would have made her case curious, as a mere study of mental perversity. Her life, she considered, had been unlucky. First, through my obstinacy in throwing up the church—by the hour together, with her sharp illogical logic, she would trace all her misfortunes back to this. Secondly, through the character of the man for whose protection she had abandoned me. Plenty of women had behaved worse than herself, from a moral point of view; but they had not had to do with a Lord Lucre! And then see how badly she had worn—a blonde, too. Other women of her colour kept their complexion and their hair till fifty. Had I succeeded? No. Unnecessary to ask the question. Had I money? Of course not.

Fixed principles, as she told me once before, were the only means to riches. At least, had I enough to put her into a comfortable lodging, and give her food, wine, and a few decent clothes (she was too weak to stand up, but wanted silk dresses, trinkets, hair-dresser's work to the last); lend her a helping hand—so with death's grasp upon her she would talk—until she was strong enough to go back to her own world, and shift for herself?

"I had enough to help her," proceeds Danton, after a moment's pause. "I got her a pretty lodging overlooking one of the parks, and was able even to satisfy her as regards ribbons and ornaments. She suffered little in body, nothing at all in spirit, and died like a child without ever taking to her bed. I saw her late one evening, together with an old hospital friend whom I had got to attend her professionally, and she was looking forward in excellent spirits, to visit-

ing the Vienna Exhibition. Half-a-dozen new dresses—of course I could give her these before I returned to Paris? and she would undertake to be the prettiest and most noticed woman in Vienna. . . . At eleven next morning, my friend called round at her lodgings as usual, and found her dead.”

“Dead !” repeats Leah, in a broken voice. “Oh, if I had known this—if you had told me the whole truth, yourself, what agony I should have been spared !”

“You knew that I loved you,” says Danton. “That truth told, and all minor details were unimportant.”

“My having listened to words of love from a married man unimportant?”

“If you had loved me, you would have had faith in me,” he exclaims. “Married or not married, bound or free—but why waste breath upon things that are over for ever? Leah, this telling of my history has brought us back pre-

cisely to where we stood last night, when the stars shone, do you remember, through the chestnuts in the Champs Elysées! You are engaged to marry Chamberlayne, Chamberlayne's riches rather, on Wednesday, and I, poor and obscure, say to you—Marry me! Break your promise, while to break it is honour, and in the year of grace eighteen hundred and seventy——, let the number of women who sell their love in the market be lessened by one.”

The energy of despair is in Danton's voice, but no faintest ray of hope kindles at his heart. He knows, better than does Leah herself, how fixed is the fate of both. Could he take her by the hand at this moment, while passion softens her, and an invisible priest seal their union by miracle, they might be wed. Jack Chamberlayne's money, actual and prospective, the magic might of all next Wednesday's millinery—these will Leah no more withstand than

could Madeleine, a dozen years ago, withstand Lord Lucre's bracelets.

"You would be the most miserable man on earth if I married you, M. Danton. We—we care for each other, but how long does love last without means? I have seen that romance played out to the cruel end, remember, and ever since I was eight years old I have prayed, night and morning, to be delivered from poverty. Forget me. Find some one with a stouter, better nature than mine. I am no more worthy of you than was she whose history you have told me. I—oh, may God help me! *How* shall I pass all the long, long years before I die?"

And with that she breaks down, in utter abandonment, and Danton takes her in his arms. Gold and love. Alas, the old wild lament—that one may not have both! Alas! that this first, only man who has ever stirred that cold heart of hers with passion, should be a pauper, a dreaming enthusiast

to whom even competency is impossible!

"Leah, give yourself, give me, another chance. Don't talk about unworthiness—any woman is worthy of any man, for the matter of that. I am not made of the stuff to be a millionaire, but never fear that I could earn you bread sufficient, yes, and a couple of silk dresses a-year. Put off your marriage, at least. Say you are ill. You are ill; I can give you a sick certificate with a good conscience, and gain breathing time. In another few days——"

"The sacrifice will be harder than now, for every hour I live I shall care more—care less for the man whom it is my duty to love beyond all others. The day after tomorrow I shall marry Jack Chamberlayne, or die. Oh! M. Danton, if I could only die! Standing before the altar, if death would come, and your hand clasp mine till the last! Life can never hold happiness for me equal to that."

And Leah speaks true ; straight out from whatever soul she possesses. Honest poverty, work, hardship, sweetened by love — from the prospect of these she shudders, as she would sink beneath their weight in actuality. But that tragic, exquisite scene . . . the church the parsons, the wealthy bridegroom . . . and the bride in her wreath and satins dying, in the arms of her true love, before them all ! This melodramatic mixture of romance and reality ; of love, with all the accessories of millinery and glitter which are the very breath of her nostrils ; touches her to the quick.

“I am speaking of life, not death, Leah ; of that fate which you hold between your hands, not of vague possibilities. Marry Chamberlayne and you will die, not picturesquely before the altar, but hideously, slowly, in the after-time, of the corrupting disease of wealth and fashion. Die, not in the flesh — that is little — but in the

soul, and by your own suicidal hand!" .

"You are hard on me — and I am weak," she falters in reply. "I must go, now, and try to rest. Will you say one — only one forgiving word to me, first?"

She is white as the dress she wears. If ever the prophetic look of heartbreak was on human face, it is on Leah Pascal's at this moment. And, reader, judge her not by your code or by mine, but by her own. She has been reared in the belief that poverty is disgrace, and love as opposed to interest a kind of disease, to be dreaded, shunned, and, if by chance it should assail you, overcome. Duty, to her mind, lies at present on the side of Jack Chamberlayne and against Danton. After marriage—well, after marriage, one must look round the world and see how other women in her position regulate their sentiments. But now, the money, the position unsecured, to vacillate is crime.

And all the time she loves this man, at whose side she stands, with a miserable intensity of love to which some far better, far cleverer women could, perhaps, not rise. No foot-rule, moral or mental, can help us much in our judgments upon others' weakness or their strength. Calculating, mercenary, self-absorbed Leah, at least, loves with the concentration of a narrow nature; will sell herself—aye, because she must; yet has not breadth of purpose sufficient to tear her heart from what she desires—and abandons!

“Say one forgiving word to me . . . whatever I may become; say you will think a little of me as a friend while I live!”

“I shall love you always, Leah. And for the present, until the ‘I will’ is said that gives you to Jack Chamberlayne, I look upon you as mine.”

So the “last words of the romance” are spoken.



CHAPTER VI.

BELL BALTIMORE'S PHILOSOPHY.

TO-MORROW brings with it such relays of cooks, milliners, wine-porters, and hired waiters, as fairly take all the inmates of the house off their equilibrium. Bonchrétien, with nightcap awry, flushed by delightful prophetic sense of general waste, and consequent profit to the firm, is here, there, everywhere. Cette pauvre chère Smeet, as upset as though she were to be married herself, mingles furtive

tears of perfectly vague origin with the vanilla and orange-flower water that she infuses into the pastry, downstairs. The boarders snatch their meals as best they may, consoling themselves for the exceedingly short commons that Madame, in her wisdom, provides for them by the reflection of the good time coming. Lord Stair goes away to his club. The Prince Charming is seen, by fits and starts, somewhat red about the eyes ("Brandy," says old Mrs. Wynch, with cruel decision); and falling, whenever he gets a chance, into affectionate raptures over Deb and Naomi, the two blessed motherless girls who will remain to him!—raptures during which the children stand mute and shamefaced, not knowing whether they are expected to laugh or cry. Cousin Bell, the morning mysteries of the dressing-table over, spends her time exclusively in Leah's room.

"Poor Miss Pascal's nerves are naturally a little shaken." So remarks Bell into the

sympathetic ear of Bonchrétien. "Under the circumstances, we should prefer dining together upstairs. Something plain and simple, an entrée or two, and a bird, and champagne. Oh, these weddings!" And Bell raises her handkerchief to her eyes. "These weddings, my dear Madame, are always melancholy affairs enough when we come to the last."

Nerves a little shaken! Well—salvolatile, rest, the sight of her trousseau finery, and three or four glasses of Clicquot, will doubtless bring her right. Mrs. Baltimore, in her sufficiently varied experience, has never known grief in which a like course of treatment has proved ineffectual. And *she* has forfeited the society of her husband, has separated for life from her children, been cut in turn by the whole of her good acquaintance, seen her dearest friend take her richest lover, and once—fearful climax!—ran the very narrowest chance of losing

her eye-lashes after chicken-pox. Leah is evidently hipped. Looking dispassionately at Jack Chamberlayne, and bearing the "last words of the romance" and the face of our handsome tenor well in mind, can it be wondered at? So are women's lives constituted. Happily, their powers of forgetting go far towards rivalling those of men, although their external resources, under the first weight of trouble may be more limited.

"If you were to cry, Leah, it would do you good. Not to the extent of disfiguring yourself for to-morrow, of course, but a good wholesome cry of about ten minutes. It relieves something on the brain. I remember the doctors telling me so when my sisters-in-law took Pussie and Floss away from me. And all these things are bodily! It does not do to confess it, my dear, but I have read numbers of medical books in my time, and, I must say, every day I live I grow more of a materialist. Cannot

cry? Well, then, use the smelling-salts constantly. The effect is nearly the same."

Leah sits before the fire, as she has done since she rose at midday, inert, silent. She is in a dulled state of nerves, as one might be who, having made up his mind fully to the surgeon's knife, experiences already by anticipation the deathly painlessness that *succeeds* to pain.

"You are very kind, Bell. I believe you are sorry for me a little. And—and would you mind not talking at all about what I feel, please? When to-morrow comes I shall pull through it as well as other people do, no doubt, if I can only sleep a bit to-night."

"Laudanum might make you sleep," says Bell, well versed, like every woman of her type, in the science of narcotics. "Only it leaves that unmistakable look, not the look for a bride, about the eyes. And chloral, till

one knows one's quantity, is an experiment. If I were to prescribe sincerely what I think would do you the most good, it would be—music. Just to go down to the salon, and hear two or three of M. Danton's charming songs. Ah, Leah, my child," and Bell's voice softens—positively something of womanly pity is in her cold blue eyes—"do you think I am really so blind as not to see how matters have stood between M. Danton and you?"

Leah starts, conscience-stricken: for a second, her impulse is to rise, fling herself upon her cousin's breast, and sob out her secret there. Then she remembers what Bell is—what she is so soon to be herself—and hardens back to steel.

"M. Danton?" How odd her voice sounds! When she is married, when all this living wretched present has become a dream, surely she will command it better when she speaks of him? "I think I may

answer in the words you used last night, Bell: whatever my crimes may be, no one need accuse me of a weakness à la Maggie McDormond."

"Well, no," answers Bell, slowly, and fixing her eyes with meaning on the girl's face, "Maggie McDormond sacrificed her interests to her passion. You have not sunk so low in my opinion, Leah, that I would suspect you of that."

"Of what do you suspect me, my dear Bell?"

"Of caring for M. Danton too much for your own happiness Leah! That you have honestly tried to say the last words of the romance, I believe—the last words of the first volume of the romance," adds Bell, in spiteful parenthesis—"and that you found their taste bitter I know also. My dear child, do you think we have not all gone through the same thing? Why, before I married Mr. Baltimore——"

And then the hacknied little fiction about the primeval sin—the one first, pure, uncalculating attachment—follows. Does the jaded woman of fashion live, in the great world, or the other world, who will not try to make you believe—yes, and herself, too—that she loved in her youth, and that true love, by cruelest circumstance rendered impossible, she has, of necessity, sunk to the thing she is?

“You see that your case is not exceptional” (this is the moral to Bell’s fable). “Quite as much as you and M. Danton can possibly care for each other, *we* cared for each other. And now—now,” says Bell, piously, “among all the mercies for which I have cause to be thankful, I esteem none greater than this—that I and my first love did not marry. Three or four years ago I came across him, married, eight children, a slatternly wife, and a dirty necktie. And that slatternly wife might have been me.”

So much for Bell Baltimore's philosophy. Later in the day Colonel Pascal comes in to have a few parental words with the dear daughter he is so soon to lose. And to him Leah, for the first, probably for the last, time in her life speaks out some portion of her mind without reserve. She is going to be Jack's wife to-morrow. No doubt of that. Every fine dress, every wedding present packed away, is another proof of that. "Another nail in my coffin!" she says once—with such a ghost of a laugh—to Deb and Naomi. And yet—and yet—if a miraculous interposition were vouchsafed from Heaven—if Colonel Pascal's embroidered shirt-frills suddenly covered a beating, pitying human heart, the cup *might* pass from her! Give him the chance! As a drowning man clutches at a weed, an air-bubble, Leah, in her extremity, feels that she will risk the desperate chance of her father's support. Let conscience, at least, in after

days have this salve—that had he chosen to stretch one finger out to her aid, she might have been saved.

“You are looking pale, my love.” They are opposite each other, beside the fire; Bell and the children, by Leah’s order, having left them alone. “I trust you find Melanie efficient?”—Melanie is the new French abigail, who is to accompany the happy bride to Italy, the first legitimate maid Leah has possessed—“otherwise, if there is anything Madame Bonchrétien can do, I am sure——”

“Melanie is quite efficient, thank you. With the assistance of Bell, and Bell’s maid, and Deb and Naomi, my enormous trousseau will, I have no doubt, be packed in time.”

“And there is really nothing in which I can help you?” The Prince Charming is curiously fidgetty in manner; keeps on the side of the fire next the door, and most

favourable for escape. "No letters to friends, or that sort of thing? Of course I shall see to the announcements in the English papers; Mrs. Baltimore undertakes to get a detailed account into the *Post*; and——"

"Father" — she rises abruptly, comes to his side, and looks down at him straight, with her miserable, wistful eyes — "I wish to God I could get out of marrying Jack!"

Colonel Pascal gives a little jump, as though a hand had struck him. "Get out — of marrying — Jack?" he stammers, a full stop of breathlessness between each syllable.

"Get out of marrying Jack. I never pretended to care for him, as you know. And I was quite willing—oh, you need not speak, I wanted no coercion on your part! quite willing to sell myself to the highest bidder. But now that it comes so near—

father—I hate it worse than I expected ; I think it right to tell you so.”

Colonel Pascal by this time has recovered his presence of mind. “Your nerves are upset, Leah. All girls talk like this before their weddings. That you have no romantic attachment to poor Jack, I know ; but the marriages that begin with romantic attachment do not, alas ! end the best. When you have been Jack’s wife three months——”

“Go on, Sir.”

“You — you will have grown accustomed——” begins Prince Charming, airily, But Leah interrupts him—oh, with what a gesture of profound contempt, for herself, for him !

“Have grown accustomed to my shame ! That’s the worst thought of all”—her head sinks upon her breast—“that one can grow accustomed, even to the degradation of such a marriage as this.”

“I—I implore you not to speak so

loud. If Bell—if one of the children should overhear!”

“If one of the children should overhear—well, in the time to come, it might be good that one of the children could say, ‘On the night before her marriage, Leah shrank from herself. On the night before her marriage, if our father had wished it, Leah might have been saved.’”

Colonel Pascal takes out his delicate pocket-handkerchief and wipes his forehead. “I don’t expect reason from you, Leah. I know whose daughter you are——”

“You had better not speak of my mother,” she interrupts, with quivering lips.

“But I do expect the common civility one member of society may look for from another. ‘Saved!’ I save you—with your wedding dinner spread, your wedding dresses packed! And all the time my conscience—my conscience,” repeats Colonel Pascal, solemnly, “is almost

smiting me for permitting you to make so absolute a love-match. You marry without a settlement. If it should please providence to remove poor Jack before the expiration of his nonage, his Cousin Robarts will come into every shilling of the property. I must really confess, Leah, that I do not understand your language."

"That is just it! You do not understand my language. I hope I shall keep pretty straight as Mrs. John Chamberlayne, papa."

"I hope to heaven you will! Chamberlayne knows tolerably well what sort of disposition you have, and seems disposed to run the risk."

"And, once married, a woman's actions are her husband's affair, are they not? It is only an unmarried daughter who can disgrace one. Papa, if to-morrow, at the very altar-steps, I was to lose courage—say the irrevocable 'No' instead of the irre-

vocal 'Yes'—should you look upon yourself as disgraced?"

Colonel Pascal's complexion turns to a ghastly shade of green—a hue such as no member of the outer world, I am sure, ever saw upon the sprightly, cheerful face of Prince Charming. "If you do not marry Jack Chamberlayne, I am ruined! I don't talk of disgrace — of the scandal such unheard-of conduct must excite—I speak of money. Jack has become security for bills that I have no means whatever of meeting. Jack's money, as you insist upon the truth, is paying for your wedding clothes, Break with him, and not only *I* am ruined—Deb and Naomi, the children you pretend to love, are beggars with me."

It would be difficult, it is unnecessary to Leah's story, to eliminate the grain or two of relative truth that may be hidden under Colonel Pascal's words. Leah believes them. That is all with which we have concern.

Leah believes them. And in doing so gives up her last chance of deliverance.

"You might have waited to fleece him, a few weeks, sir. You need not have sold me in advance."

This is all her answer. To Colonel Pascal's intense relief, a knock and message come just at this moment at the door; and a quarter of an hour later he is showing his white teeth down in the drawing-room, receiving felicitations, taking out his pocket-handkerchief as he speaks of the dear little, half-tearful, half-happy daughter he has quitted upstairs.

Deb and Naomi beggars! Well, her father's visit, after all, has proved tonic. As she listens to the children's merry chatter, as she watches Deb's small figure, flying hither and thither, in wild excitement, after the two grand ladies' maids, Leah feels that her marriage—the sacrifice that is to stand between them and ruin—cannot be wholly

evil. (Among all the unwitting sophistries of conscience, is anything more curious than our different little modes of self-extenuation!) If these children are to be saved, it must be through her; and her only means of saving them is Jack Chamberlayne—or another.

The short autumn day dies into twilight. At last the whole of the bridal dresses are packed; Bell has gone to her room to write letters; the ladies' maids have descended to their tea, and Deb and Naomi, left alone, begin to talk over the division of Leah's maiden wardrobe.

"I am to have the sprigged white muslin," says Deb. "It will make me two little evening frocks—Leah says so. And I am to have all the ribbons and flowers I can find, and the trimmings off the ball-dresses, to make dolls' clothes."

"I shall have the best velvet jacket," says Naomi. "It will not want taking in a

bit: I have so much more figure than Leah! The black dress spotted with gold I mean, to put away till I wear trains, and the old brown silk, you see, Deb, will cut up at once into a tidy polonaise."

Leah, on this, jumps up from her place beside the fire, and crosses over to the corner where the children are reviewing their spoils. Deb's small lap is filled to overflowing with odds and ends of finery. The old brown silk—the dress in which Danton first saw Leah Pascal—is in Naomi's hands.

"Naomi, my sister, you should not discuss the property of a moribund until he has lost his sense of hearing. It is not delicate. What is that you are saying about my brown silk?"

"Only—that it will make me a tidy polonaise," stammers Naomi. "Of course you are taking none of your old things with you. Melanie says brides never take away their old things."

"I am going to take my brown silk," says Leah, shortly. "But you need not shock Melanie's pride by telling her so. Never mind, Naomi," for Naomi, with her usual fine common sense, has placed herself in front of the dress with an air of battle. "I will give you — well, that new cream-coloured tussore that you admired so much, instead."

"The lovely tussore, out of your trousseau, instead of the brown silk!" cries little Deb. "Why, it's as old as the hills, Leah, and quite unfashionably cut. I heard Mademoiselle Melanie say so."

"The colour suits my complexion, Deb." Even the children are struck by the odd unsteadiness of her voice. "Bring a candle, one of you, and let us get it safely out of sight before the two fine ladies return."

And with her own trembling hands Leah Pascal puts the dress away—oh, that she

could put away the memories connected with it as well!—jealousy hidden under the silks and satins and fripperies of the future Mrs. Chamberlayne.





CHAPTER VII.

"CLAIRETTE."

"IN Paris, by special licence, on Wednesday, October 18th, John Frederick Chamberlayne, to Leah, eldest daughter of Colonel Pascal. The bride wore a *poult de soie* train, richly trimmed with Brussels lace over puffings of white tulle. The bodice was made with one of the new Henri Quatre basques, and had on it an exquisite spray of natural orange blossoms: the same was worn in the hair, and a magnificent Brussels veil.

At six o'clock p.m. the bridal party arrived at the chapel in the Avenue Marbœuf, and, under the courteous superintendence of the officials, ranged themselves near the altar, awaiting the coming of the bride. Presently the organ pealed forth Mendelssohn's delicious march, and the cynosure of all eyes entered the aisle, radiant in her fresh youth and happiness, on her gallant father's arm. Among the company we especially noticed Lord Stair, who officiated, by proxy, as best man, and Sir George Luttrell, Bart. On their return to the Rue Castiglione, the distinguished party partook of a sumptuous collation previous to the departure of the bride and bridegroom. We hear that the destination of the youthful pair is Italy."

Thus the newspaper description, obtained through Bell Baltimore's influence, from the florid pen of "our special correspondent" in Paris. Now for unembellished prose.

A bride in white silk and Brussels lace—as far as clothing goes, our correspondent is accurate; pale as the dress she wears, tearless, awfully composed. An agitated father—good cause for agitation has Colonel Pascal, cogent business anxieties on the score of cheques, I O U's and bills, until the irrevocable blessing be spoken! A bridegroom primed—nay, one might almost write, over-primed—with absinthe. Substantial grown-up bridesmaids in blue, ethereal child bridesmaids in rose, and a bridal party comprising the more presentable inmates of Bonchrétien's house—Mrs. Tomson gorgeous as a peony in magenta satin, the Comtesse gracefully antique in silver-grey, with a sprinkling of the Prince Charming's chance-made Paris friends, the pair of titles put upon record by our own correspondent—and Danton.

Up to the last moment Colonel Pascal, uneasily suspicious of the truth, scattered

liberal hints through the establishment as to the expediency of M. Danton's absenting himself from the wedding. "Invited by Chamberlayne, certainly, and an excellent-hearted creature Chamberlayne is, but inconsiderate as a child. Under certain circumstances—ahem!—a gentleman, meritorious no doubt in himself, may not always have the *exact* coat for an occasion like the present. And nothing would be more painful to one's sense of delicacy than to hurt the feelings of so very charming—an artist."

But the meritorious gentleman himself has evidently not looked upon the coat difficulty as an insuperable one. Punctually as the clock strikes six, Danton arrives at the chapel in the Avenue Marbœuf. His is the first hand to grasp the bridegroom's at the altar-railing; his the one face which, veiled though she be, the bride discerns among the sea of faces around, as, leaning

on her gallant father's arm, radiant in her fresh youth and happiness, she walks up the chapel!

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment"

Thus, according to the prescribed formula, does the priest, speaking unto the persons that shall be married, enjoin them if reason exist why they may not be joined together in Holy Matrimony now to confess it. And the bridesmaids simper over their bouquets—all save Deb, who, with tears flowing fast, is clasping her dabbled veil to her face. And Jack Chamberlayne looks as though he would fain the earth should open and swallow him. And Leah, despair at her heart, here in the presence of the man she loves with a love that renders any other union sacrilege, keeps silent. And the fashionable marriage goes on.

"Will the bridegroom have this woman

to his wedded wife? Will he love, comfort, honour, and, forsaking all other, keep him only unto her, in sickness and in health, for evermore?"

Shaky and horribly nervous, yet not without genuine feeling in his voice, poor Jack pledges his vows with as much readiness as he would stake a hundred Napoleons on the running of a horse or a throw of the dice: and then comes the turn of the bride.

"Will Leah Pascal promise," Danton listening, "to obey, serve, love, *honour*, Jack Chamberlayne, in sickness and in health, as long as they both shall live?"

And for a brief breathing space she hesitates: thinks of Danton, of herself, of the honest love which even yet might be their portion. Then all her girlish years, with their troubles, poverty, petty daily shifts and humiliations, sweep before her, as in that supreme lightning-flash of memory in

which it is said a drowning man reviews every past detail of his life. She sees her mother's wasted face ; she hears her father's hectoring, peevish voice as he talks of bills, ruin, dishonour ; she sees Naomi and little Deb beggars. And then she becomes conscious that the clergyman is prompting her, sotto voce, that Naomi, with beauty unstained by tears, stands ready to unbutton her glove and hold her bouquet, and stammers forth the "I will," by which her soul is lost. "With clearness delightful to listen to," say those among the spectators who are near enough to catch the accents of the bride's voice.

So far, well. Now who giveth this woman to be married to this man? The Prince Charming, with a very pretty display of parental emotion, giveth her ; at which affecting juncture some of the old ladies in the chapel have recourse to their pocket-handkerchiefs. And next the two plight

their troth ; the symbol of eternity is placed on Leah's cold hand ; and Jack, too upset by this time to know the meaning of a word he utters, repeats, as he is told, that with this ring he weds, with his body worships, with all his worldly goods — soul-moving climax—endows her. And they kneel ; and the priest after joining their hands, pronounces them Man and Wife.

Colonel Pascal's fears, Danton's lingering hopes, Leah's vacillations, doubt, remorse—all are over.

Man and Wife—listening to intercessions for spiritual grace, to prayers that they may so live together in this life that in the world to come they fail not of life everlasting ! The fashionable marriage (a few more psalms, and an unimportant homily or duty run through) is at an end. The bridegroom kisses his pale wife ; the father kisses his daughter ; poor Deb, her finery piteously dishevelled, rushes up and clings to the

bride's grand Brussels skirt. Then comes the vestry business; hand-shaking, name-signing, felicitations. And then the common crowd is gratified by seeing Mrs. Chamberlayne, on her husband's arm, walk up the chapel. And the gamins waiting outside, expectant of half-francs, give a faint huzza as the young pair drive rapidly away in the smart hired carriage-and-pair that stands ready to convey them from the Avenue Marbœuf to the Rue Castiglione.

"And thank the Lord that part of the play is over," cries Jack, the second he is alone with his bride. "I have laughed pretty freely at other fellows in my time, and, by George, I know what it is myself, now! I would as soon be shot as go through such a ceremony again."

"Well, I don't suppose you will have a chance just at present," says Leah, with a poor little attempt at jocularitv. "You really were terribly nervous, Jack," she

adds. "I was on tenter-hooks lest you should drop the ring, your hand shook so."

"You were cool enough for us both, at all events," retorts Jack. "But I believe women in their hearts like the raree-show of the whole thing. It shows *them* off, no matter what sort of figure the unhappy wretch of a man may cut."

"I hope we are not going to quarrel on our wedding-day, Jack?"

"Quarrel! I love you better than all the women I've ever seen put together," exclaims Jack. "And you looked as handsome as the deuce, Mrs. Chamberlayne, that you did, standing there in your silks and laces, and with your cold, marble face. And now that it's over, and that I shall get rid of your family for ever, I mean to be the happiest fellow on the earth, I can tell you."

And putting his arm round her, with warmth detrimental to puffed tulle and

Brussels trimming, he kisses her, for the first time in his life, on her lips. Primed, trebly primed is poor Jack, as I have written, and Leah shudders; then . . . remembering, tries not too palpably to recoil from her life's Lord and Master.

"One blessing at least we may be thankful for," says Jack, his good humour all restored. "We have none of your stuck-up affairs in the way of breakfast to look forward to. We had enough of that kind of thing in church. You have got hold of that singing fellow, Danton, I see, so we can make him tune up a bit to enliven us, and when dinner is over I will give you the 'Ten Little Niggers' in grand style, you see if I don't."

With this cheerful prospect in store, Leah gets out at Madame Bonchrétien's door. Désiré, in a pair of Colonel Pascal's cleaned white gloves, and with a bouquet as big as himself in his button-hole, dances forth to

hand Madame Chamberlayne from her carriage. Splendid hired attendants throng the entrance — not the confectioner's men, in dingy sables familiar to London eyes, but gentlemen in pink silk calves and liveries that do not look tarnished by gaslight. Bonchrétien and cette pauvre Smeet advance, and claim a kiss, each, from the bride as she crosses the threshold.

“Don't forget the poor bridegroom,” cries Jack in his shrill falsetto, and seizing Madame Bonchrétien round the waist, he salutes her loudly. Then Rose, the good-looking chambermaid, happening to peep, in a new set of ribbons, round the corner of a door, he rushes off in wild pursuit of *her* down the corridor. Désiré winks at the hired liveries. Madame Bonchrétien and Miss Smith exchange significant looks. The bride, a cold smile on her lips, her head carried well in the air, walks upstairs alone to the deserted drawing-room.

A foolish incident like this may mean nothing or everything. To Leah, in her morbidly high-strung state of nerves, it means everything. "Lord Stair should have been here, in common fairness, to receive me," she thinks, with the bitter self-mockery of the wretched. "It only wants Milor's presence to make the parable complete!"

Lord Stair is not there to receive her, of course, but he arrives in one of the first carriages that convey the guests from the church. He is the first person to address Leah as "Mrs. Chamberlayne," and at once subsides, as by right, into close attendance upon her for the remainder of the evening. Jack knows no more about the etiquette of weddings than he knows about any other observance of decent life; and—his pursuit of Rose over—begins kissing the children, joking with the old ladies, with Colonel Pascal, with everybody. How cold Leah turns at every excited outburst of her

husband's voice ! How well she can imagine the fine bacchanalian spirit with which he will give them the ' Ten Little Nigger Boys ' by-and-by !

By seven all the guests have arrived, and Jack, under Pascal's directions, offers his wife his arm. They descend to the *salle-à-manger*, where immense brilliancy of gas, mock plate, and a profusion of flowers, chiefly paper, await them ; not a bad display altogether, considering ways and means. The bride and bridegroom sit behind the cake ; opposite them are the bridesmaids, with Lord Stair and Danton—everybody in festive spirits ; M. Danton and the prettiest Miss Sherrington rapidly becoming friends, or more than friends ; even Deb's tears drying at the thought of barley sugar temples, silver crowned Cupids, and a magnificent menial, in pink silk stockings, standing in attendance upon her own small person.

"My dear Madame Bonchrétien," cries Colonel Pascal, in his bland voice, "we have, I think, one cover too much"—indicating, with a wave of the hand, an empty chair about three places down on the right. "Sir George Luttrell," he consults a little programme of the table that lies by his plate. "Yes, Sir George should be next Mrs. Baltimore; if you would kindly have the chair removed."

Sir George is a short-sighted, very prim little man, who knows no one in the room, his host included. How he was picked up, at the eleventh hour, only Colonel Pascal can say. Why he was picked up, we have seen from our own correspondent's announcement to the *World of Fashion*. "We noticed Lord Stair and Sir George Luttrell, Bart., among the distinguished guests."

"If you will kindly have the chair removed, my dear Madame," repeats the Prince Charming, raising his voice.

Bonchrétien pantomimes energetically with hands and eyes; she turns red, she coughs; then despatches Désiré to whisper a ghastly truth into Colonel Pascal's ear. The vacant chair is for Mrs. Wynch.

Colonel Pascal, never a forgiving man, save to the rich, omitted purposely to bid his old enemy to the feast; Bonchrétien honestly forgot her existence. But the stout old warrior did not forget herself, or her rights. At a quarter past six, the wedding party still at church, Mrs. Wynch, in her snuffiest cap and gown, tottered down from her bedroom on the fourth floor and took her place, as usual, at table. The hired liveries, the barley-sugar temples and silver Cupids—none of these unwonted fineries did Mrs. Wynch see, or pretend to see.

“Désiré, où est Désiré? Il est six heures et demi sonné, et la soupe nong servie. Apportez-moi mong soupe.”

And then upon Madame Bonchrétien,

hastily summoned by one of the hired men-servants, fell the task of explanation. The dinner would be at seven—of course Madame Wynch was aware we have a wedding in the house? Anything *cette chère dame* would command should be mounted to her apartment, and——

“*Cette chère dame* will take her dinner in the proper room, and in her own chair, as usual,” cried the old woman, with a kindling eye. “Seven o’clock, you say. You might have had the civility to warn me of the change of hour sooner. However, I’ll pass that over. You are an ignorant person, Madame Bonchrétien; you know no better. And see that my place is kept—three from the head of the table. And if any of that man’s guests occupy it, I shall tell ’em to move.”

What was a facile but mercenary Bonchrétien to do? Already whispers have reached her that Colonel Pascal, his eldest

daughter off his hands, is likely to put the children to school and betake himself to Monaco. And Mrs. Wynch is permanent; with a box of battered spoons and forks, real silver, with a poor little trinket-case of fifty years' old jewels, all of which are likely to become Madame's property, should Providence see fit that anything happen to Mrs. Wynch.

"The society will be en toilette, Madame Wynch, just the same as for evening party. If you don't love the trouble of dressing——"

"I neither love it nor mean to take it, Madame," was Mrs. Wynch's shrill interruption. "If I am fine enough for my own company I am fine enough for Colonel Pascal and his friends, wedding or not."

And she keeps her word to the letter, stooping not even to the small concession of putting on her Sunday cap, or the well-

known cotton velvet trimmed with ermine. With the guests in their places, the hired liveries solemn and upright, Colonel Pascal still under the effects of Désiré's awful whisper, in totters the little witch-like old woman, dirty, untidy, with head-gear awry, with malignant glance at them all, coughing horribly. She makes her way to the head of the table, and gets into the vacant chair—her chair—beside Sir George Luttrell, Bart.

Sir George Luttrell, Bart., too short-sighted to discern between a dirty old lady and a clean one, gives a polite half-bow; then draws himself together, after the manner of prim little men at dinner parties. Mrs. Wynch grunts.

Colonel Pascal feels the cold dewdrops mount on his forehead. Give him time, however short, and the Prince Charming is a man who can explain away most of the embarrassments of this mortal life. "Eccen-

tric, but wealthy. A dear old soul, if one must be frank, from whom we have great expectations." These things, and a dozen like unto them, would he whisper, extenuatingly, into Sir George's ear if it were possible. But not now—not now! How if one should try the desperate chance of appealing to Mrs. Wynch's own feelings of humanity? He tries it: bending forward with as much bonhomie of voice and manner as he can improvise, addresses her as his dear old friend. "So charmed that his dear old friend has found herself strong enough at the last moment to venture among them."

His dear old friend remains deaf and blind as destiny.

"Apportez ma vine, Désiré," she shouts, in her gruff, querulous tones. "Ma propre vine. Il reste un bong demi dans la bouteille. Champagne? I hate champagne. Apportez la vine à moi. Il reste un demi dans la bouteille."

Sir George Luttrell, who knows no more of his host than his name, now feels sufficiently interested to take up his eye-glass and examine his neighbour attentively. She gives him a civil nod in return.

"You are a stranger in this house, Sir, I presume?"

The prim little baronet makes answer that he is a stranger.

"Then I advise you to keep to the vine ordinary. I've lived under Madame's roof eleven years, and we have had three moves. They say three moves are as bad as a fire. Any way, I have lost enough since first I came to her. Yes, I've lived with Madame Bonchrétien eleven years, and I know boarding-house wines pretty well. It's *all* ordinary, Sir," in a confidential stage whisper, "only with different labels; brevet rank, I call it, for company. And as to champagne—no, I thank you;" this to one of the hired waiters who at Colonel Pascal's instigation is attempt-

ing to fill her glass. "I never take anything in a boarding-house but what I pay for myself. It saves unpleasantness in the end."

After such an exhibition, of what avail is further attempt at grandeur? Where is one's conversational intimacy with the peerage? where are one's own familiar Lords, Dukes, and Lady Marchionesses? Sir George, with the pleasure common to us all at witnessing the discomfiture of others—Sir George, who, with a pretty and creditable woman on either hand, might not have opened his lips a dozen times, becomes quite filial in his attentions to Mrs. Wynch; and the whole company is enlivened by the tones of her shrill, piercing voice. Boarding-houses in general and this boarding-house in particular; pretentious snobbism, mercenary fathers, mercenary daughters, "petty cravies" and the probable fate that lies before them—not a subject but has some

Rembrandt-like light thrown upon it by Mrs. Wynch, and with a force and trenchancy impossible for any one at the table to misunderstand.

"The old soul is worth her weight in gold," whispers Jack to his bride. "Keeps us all alive, and puts Papa in his place. By Jove, I never saw Papa look so crestfallen before. If the old witch would only make him forget the speechifying!"

But Colonel Pascal has his eye on speech-maker number one, the inevitable parson, already. Speechifying will, at least, silence Wynch's lips; at least hasten on the time when the feast shall be at an end, the last bottle of chemical champagne opened.

The inevitable parson proposes, of course, the health of the bride and bridegroom; is jocular, sericus, jocular again, as he has been at a good many scores of wedding feasts before. And there is a great clinking

of glasses and wishing of health to bride and bridegroom (distinct among the hum of other voices, how Leah hears *one* voice speak those words!) And then poor Jack finds himself all of a sudden on his legs, stammering forth reiterated imbecilities as best he may, and anathematizing marriage as even he, with all his predilections, never anathematized it before, in his soul.

Colonel Pascal's health is drank next, Lord Stair the proposer ; and very neat and touching is the speech, prepared three weeks since, in which he responds. This is the happiest, and yet, perhaps, the saddest day of his existence. He loses a daughter, he gains a son. ("Do you, by Jove!" mutters Jack between his teeth.) The kind friends by whom he is surrounded will sufficiently appreciate the depth of his emotions to pardon his want of eloquence ; but when we feel most, we feel in silence. . . .

Leah, my girl, heaven bless you!
And then the Prince Charming falls back into his chair, while a couple of real tears stand in his hawk eyes—a sight for gods and men!

The bridesmaids, the groomsmen, the parson, Madame Bonchrétien—everybody's health is drank in succession; and the chemical champagne begins to take effect, on Jack's unsteady nerves and weak head most of all.

"You have not given us a speech, Monsieur," he cries, across the table, to Danton, whose flow of high spirits continues still unbroken. "The only man here who has not made a speech, and, by——, you must give us a song intead. Mrs. Chamberlayne," turning with maudlin affection to his bride, "what do you say? Monsieur Danton must give us a song, eh?"

How can Mrs. Chamberlayne, thus appealed to, help looking across the table at

Danton! There is a look in her eyes almost of physical pain—a blank, frightened look, that one would say must stir any man's heart to compassion. But the glance that comes back to her from Danton is cold as steel: no more mercy in it than she might expect from Lord Stair or from her own father. What right has she to look for mercy from any man on the face of God's earth save him who sits beside her, with glazing eyes and thickened utterance—her husband!

“No song, no supper. Come, Monsieur, we won't accept excuses. You have had your supper, now for the song. Miss Sherrington, use your influence. Monsieur Danton, I am sure, cannot refuse you anything.”

Miss Sherrington, the blue-eyed bridesmaid, into whose ear Danton has been whispering pretty things during the past hour, simpers and blushes, and would like

so much—oh! so very much—to hear M. Danton's voice. She is sure he must have a *lovely tenor* voice, and——

“We may perhaps hope for a little music in the drawing-room by-and-by,” says Colonel Pascal, stiffly, from the head of the table.

“When my wife and I are gone,” interrupts Jack, with his accustomed frankness. “But you see we want to have the benefit of a little music ourselves. Now, Danton, let us hear the lovely tenor—none of your fine classical symphonies, but something we all know out of ‘Madame Angot’ or ‘La Périhole.’ If you don’t tune up quickly, I’ll give you the ‘Ten Little Nigger Boys’ myself, see if I don’t.”

At this awful threat Leah gets courage to speak. “It would indeed be very kind of M. Danton” she begins, this time without lifting her eyes above the level of her plate. And, whether through

pity or some widely different feeling, who shall say? Danton obeys her wish instantly, and sings a song, chosen, as Jack desired, from the familiar opening scene of 'Madame Angot.'

In aftertimes Leah may think it would have been better if Jack had given them the 'Ten Little Nigger Boys,' chin obligato and all, than she have had the burthen of 'Clairette' ringing for ever through her heart as an accompaniment upon her wedding-tour.

"Certainement j'aimais Clairette ;
Mais dois-je mourir de chagrin,
Quand peut-être une autre conquête
Peut me venger de son hymen."

Danton goes through the song admirably ; every note clear and melodious ; the little air of half-tender, half-mocking resignation to fate that the words require, given to perfection. Every one is delighted ; the bridegroom most of all.

“Wait a bit,” he cries, “Monsieur ! Wait till your own wedding comes, and see if you are in as fine tune then. An easy thing, by George, to make merry at other men’s executions as long as your own neck continue free of the halter.”

And now Colonel Pascal begins to glance meaningly at the bride, and the ladies take up their bouquets. In another five minutes Bonchrétien is already contesting over the spoils of the feast with the hired footmen ; and Leah, as she displays her presents in the salon, knows that the time draws on apace when her hand will meet Danton’s in a last farewell ; knows that the time draws on apace when she will go away from the old life for ever—the old girlish life that, by contrast, already seems sweet—Jack Chamberlayne’s wife.

Ten o’clock strikes, the bride is cloaked ready for departure, the carriage that is to

take Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne to their hotel in the Rue de Rivoli is at the door. She must speak to him once more, she feels, if she die for it, yes, even with the burthen of 'Clairette' ringing in her ears. It happens that Danton just now stands alone in the inner drawing-room. His capacity for saying pretty things to Miss Sherrington seems exhausted. His noisy spirits are gone. A kind of sick, weary look is on his face. Abruptly the bride crosses both rooms and is at his side. Last night she would have invented an excuse for such an action—a book forgotten on the table, the name of that song M. Danton promised her. She needs no pretext, she thinks of no small proprieties now.

"Do you, can you forgive me?" she stammers, a whole lifetime of agony in her voice.

Danton turns and looks at her, looks

straight into the clear golden eyes that have betrayed him.

"I told you beforehand I should forgive you," is his answer, uttered without a shade of hesitation in his voice. "I do more. I thank you."

As cruel a speech, perhaps, after a good many centuries of cruelty, as any man ever made to any woman. Leah feels that no further blow can hurt her now.

"I thank you." She repeats his words automatically, intending neither sarcasm nor reproach. Then turns quietly away, goes back among the guests, and puts her hand under her husband's arm.

"Better get our good-byes over, Jack, had we not? Papa is looking unutterable entreaties to us to depart."

"Papa cannot want us to leave more sincerely than we want to leave him," growls Jack, who has only just made his appearance

in the drawing-room. "Not another glass of wine, not as much as a soda-and-brandy to be had in the house 'by Colonel Pascal's instructions.' If I had only known, I would have paid for the whole affair myself, straight off."

After which gentle reproach the leave-taking begins. The Prince Charming, the little sisters, Bell Baltimore, press forward to kiss the bride. There is much hand-shaking there are many and loud felicitations. And then Leah descends the stairs on her husband's arm, and goes forth through the chill, murk air of the autumn night to her carriage.

The wedding guests all throng outside the porte cochère; old shoes are in readiness for throwing; even Mrs. Wynch, the fatal death's head at the feast, gropes her way forth, and shrieks a shrill adieu that sounds like a malediction upon the newly-wedded pair.

"Bless you, my girl; bless both of you, my children," says Colonel Pascal, looking in at the carriage window, and at the same time signing to the coachman to have his reins ready. "'Poste restante, Como,' will be your first address, and you have promised to write daily. God bless you."

And they start. The horses, restless at waiting, plunge a little just at getting off, and Leah has an excuse for putting her head through the window and looking back. Danton, who wished neither bride nor bridegroom farewell, stands somewhat apart from the other guests on the pavement; and for one moment these two death-white faces confront each other, full.

One moment: then all is over. The first part of Leah Pascal's life-drama is acted out.



CHAPTER VIII.

THOSE DIAMONDS!

SHIFT the scene, and raise the curtain upon another act. The season of the year, June; the place, a Bayswater drawing-room; personages, Mr. Charles Robarts, barrister-at-law, and Hetty his wife.

The smart Louis Quinze timepiece above the fireplace points to seven, and Mr. and Mrs. Robarts, in dinner array, await the coming of their brougham. *Their* brougham—possessed eight weeks, and whereof the

paint still smells ! Their brougham—of whose very coachman they stand in awe, and which, for every practical purpose of use and enjoyment, is so inferior to the hired vehicles of old days, the good old days when Hetty's arts had as yet failed to beguile her husband into the toils of "a carriage of our own," and liveries.

Mr. Robarts is the cousin to whom, had Providence removed Jack Chamberlayne in his nonage, the Chamberlayne property would have reverted ; may still revert—Jack will not attain his legal majority till October. It is with Jack and his wife that the Robartses are to dine this evening. The men have already met since the return of bride and bridegroom to London. The ladies have yet to make each other's acquaintance ; and Mrs. Hetty's war-paint and accoutrements have, you may be sure, been put on with extra determination of hard hitting and no quarter for the occasion.

"I try my utmost not to be prepossessed against our Jewish relative, Charles. From all that I can gather respecting her style and manner, and considering that a woman like Mrs. Baltimore is her associate, it is impossible that we can be sympathetic. But I shall try to tolerate this wife of your unfortunate cousin's, as a duty."

Mrs. Robarts is a small, clear-voiced, clear-featured woman of between thirty and forty. She had fifteen thousand pounds of her own, for which fifteen thousand pounds it is thought Mr. Robarts married her, and she has a temper and an intellect; sings, writes, is good in private theatricals, models in clay, and has a whole list of little Platonic flirtations with celebrities. She has also five small children, in steps, who have also tempers and intellects. "Theophilus, my eldest boy, dreams in German," says Hetty. "Yes, indeed. I frequently make Mr. Robarts listen to him in his sleep. Alphonso,

the second, is passionate, simply passionate for music; and the girls, infants though they are, are artists. What my Hetty can do with scissors and a sheet of paper is amazing."

Her babies, their perambulators, their intellects; herself, her brougham, her intellect, comprise Hetty's scheme of the universe—with, of course, such minor adjuncts as her excellently managed Bayswater household, her servants, her husband. In her dress you may discover the key-note of her character, as you may in the case of ninety-nine women out of every hundred. She buys handsome, well-cut clothes, goes to the fountain head for jewelry, follows fashion with Spartan exactness in the matter of hats and bonnets, and yet for ever strikes harshly on the beholder's sense—a picture painted with the finest colours, on the finest canvas, by a bungler's hand! Purple, yellow, red; every rainbow hue will Hetty boldly wear,

giving no thought either to her complexion or the occasion, and ignoring all those becoming veils and ruffles, those unexpected knots of lace and velvet which, in the hands of women who attire themselves by instinct, not rule, are the very poetry of dress.

In upholstery it is the same. Mrs. Robarts's colouring is what, without malice, may be set down as the sallow-British ; cheek, hair and eyelash all palely similar. Yet are the hangings of her drawing-room sea-green, unrelieved by a spot of kindly crimson or all-relieving white. At one end of the room is a portrait, life-size, of Hetty herself, leaning, as on a pedestal, across the shoulder of meekly-sitting Mr. Robarts. Upon a console between the windows is a bust of Hetty in marble ; upon a bracket, somewhere else, a statuette of Hetty in terra cotta. Scientific German treatises are to be found scattered about, together with the latest volume of

esoteric verse by the latest fashionable poet, and Mrs. Robarts's own novel—Hetty has actually written, and, at considerable expense to Mr. Robarts, presented to the public, a three-volume novel. Chairs, tables, sofas, all have been chosen according to the highest published standard of Art in domestic life. And still, with the sea-green hangings, with that portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Robarts grimly staring at you, with Hetty presiding, perhaps, over her "harlequin" tea-service in a mauve of the wrong shade—still is the result incongruous, jarring.

Dine with them, and the influence of Hetty's taste becomes still more apparent. Mr. Robarts himself—a caustic, silent man, possessed of much common sense—would, if he had a voice in the matter, give you a well-roasted leg of mutton, a bottle of fair claret, and have you waited on by a decent parlour-maid—the style of entertainment which, without fear of criticism, an honest,

hard-working man may offer a prince. Hetty has *dîners Russe*, invariably badly cooked (oh, those *entrées* of Hetty's—those *ragoûts* and *salmis* that will not yield to the refined influence of fork and bread, but demand cold steel for their severance!) *Dîners Russe*, æsthetic talk, and a succession of cheap fine wines, wrongly served by the Brummagem brand-new footman, in ridiculous livery, who stands, too big for the room, behind poor Robarts's chair.

“We shall, I suppose, have to invite the Chamberlaynes in return, Charles. The difficulty will be to know whom to ask to meet them. I assume, as you are taking me to dine there, she really is——”

“Really is——?” repeats Mr. Robarts, absently. “I did not quite catch the drift of your remark, my love.”

“A person of unblemished reputation, Mr. Robarts. This notorious Mrs. Balti-

more is, I am told, already her most intimate friend."

"Scarcely that, I think, Hetty. Jack Chamberlayne's wife has been pointed out to me two or three times in the Park, and on each occasion——"

"Why do you hesitate?"

"I am afraid of shocking you by mentioning some one more notorious than Mrs. Baltimore."

"I did not know such a person could exist," says Hetty. "And considering the ruin your cousin's marriage has entailed upon our innocent children, I certainly cannot look upon anything connected with them in the light of a joke."

"I am not joking in the least, my dear Hetty, neither do I look upon the ruin of our innocent children as a confirmed fact. The person whom I have always seen in Mrs. Chamberlayne's society is—not the notorious Mrs. Baltimore, but Lord Stair."

“*Lord Stair!* And who is that, Charles — a law lord or a real one? Is he good-looking — is he young? Do you think we shall be likely to meet him there to-day?”

For Hetty, much though she loves art and literature, loves the peerage more. The best among us has his price; a title is Hetty's; and titles are so desperately hard to come by in plebeian Bayswater! A tarnished Honourable, the wife of a Knight, and a rickety Dean—higher prizes than this has Hetty never yet grasped for any of her afternoon teas or evening receptions. How if this new cousin — reputation or no reputation, Jew, heretic, or Christian — should prove a stepping-stone to the nobility!

“By referring to the peerage,” says Mr. Robarts, gravely, “we ascertain that George Francis, Lord Stair, is the fifth viscount of that name, and forty years of age. In

former days his lordship was, I believe, an outlaw from his country for debt; and, if report speaks true, is still, in spite of his ugliness, one of the greatest lady-killers extant. Look after your peace of mind, Hetty, if we do meet him. You don't know the fascinations of these Fools of Quality."

"Indeed, I was in the daily habit of meeting the aristocracy before I married," says Hetty. "My mamma's visiting-list comprised more titles than commoners. Only to look over the franks on her old letters will show you in what kind of circle my mamma's family moved. But you have always your little sneer ready, Mr. Roberts."

In spite, however, of this small breeze matrimonial, Hetty's frame of mind is amiable, as "our brougham" bears her along eastward towards Piccadilly. "Mrs. Chamberlayne may be dressed in what she

will," thinks Hetty, with a complacent glance at her own brilliant display of lilac crape and satin. "My dress is Gask and Gask's last, and the fashion of my hair has only been out a week, and no one can go higher than the highest. If Lord Stair should be there, he must at least detect the difference in our *style*. And as to Mrs. Baltimore——

"If Mrs. Baltimore is of the party, I trust most sincerely they will have the good taste not to introduce her to us," she remarks to her husband, as the brougham slackens speed, about midway along Piccadilly. "Lord Stair is, of course, beside the question. See that my hair is right, Charles; are you certain the flower is in its place? A man may have been wild in his youth, yet the world think no worse of him later on——above all, a man in such a position as Lord Stair's. And your cousin's wife I mean to tolerate on principle. I will not

know your cousin's wife's disreputable female friends."

"Let us hope they will only have invited men to meet us, then," says Mr. Robarts.

Mindful of their precarious tenure of riches, mindful of the fact that every sovereign they touch is transmitted to them at present through the fingers of the Israelites, Jack and his wife are living, "for economy," in one of the most extravagant private hotels in London, an arrangement made for them by their friend and Mentor, Lord Stair. "In an hotel one knows one's expenses to a shilling," says poor Jack. "And if, after all, I drop off the perch before October, my inconsolable widow will not be saddled with a house and servants." An extravagant private hotel as the basis of their joint expenditure. Carriages and horses, an opera box, jewelry and dresses without stint, on the side of the wife. On the side of the husband, every

costly superfluity of the old bachelor life—the “snuff-boxes, watches, heads of canes, et cetera”—by which now, as in the days of Lord Chesterfield, idle gentlemen contrive to bring their pockets to the same condition as their brains, with the heavy addition of nightly loo and lansquenet. So Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne have made their entrance into the big world of fashion and of folly.

Hetty, a little short-breathed at the thought of possible viscounts, mounts the stairs on her husband's arm, and finds herself ushered into a room sweet with natural flowers, amber-lighted, cool, on the first floor—a room that Leah's presiding taste has rendered as little like the conventional stiff drawing-room of a London hotel as possible. Jack, his feet higher than his head, sits rocking himself in an American chair at an open window, his eyes closed. An odd volume of a library novel lies beside him on the carpet.

“ . . . How are you, Charles — well? And, Hetty, how does time use you? Why, we have not met for ages. Extensively got up, by Jove! Hope you didn't expect a party, or that sort of thing. I am just as little of a dandy as I always was.”

Marriage has certainly wrought no improvement on Jack's outer man. He is somewhat thinner, somewhat more hectic than when we saw him last in Paris; and certain haggard lines, telling of increased fast living, or evil temper, or both, have gathered round the weak, worn lips and shallow forehead. His dress—is what it always was! At first Leah tried to reform him, as far, at least, as the wearing of evening clothes was concerned; and while the honeymoon lasted, Jack obeyed. Alas! the honeymoon was of briefest duration, and with it fled Jack's allegiance—on other vital points besides those of white ties and black coats.

"Never can see the fun of making an absurdity of oneself, because the sun has set, Mrs Robarts. Of course, if I was Charles—Well, as I am, if I and Mrs. Chamberlayne led the same ball-going lives I should have to do it. But Mrs. Chamberlayne and I do not lead the same ball-going lives—not by any means!"

Hetty, who has subsided amidst her lilac clouds upon a sofa, gives an expressive "ah!" and a look at her husband.

"You must have enjoyed the freedom of the Continent, Jack," remarks Mr. Robarts. "At least one is not bored by all the dressing and dining, and formality of this London life of ours abroad."

"Enjoyed!" Jack returns to his rocking-chair and former position, only, out of deference to Hetty's presence, perhaps, with his feet about two inches *lower* than his head. "Enjoyed! Yes, very like enjoyment, in-

deed. We stayed at the Italian lakes first, in pouring rain. Three weeks of that." He shudders: those three weeks comprised the honeymoon. "Turin, Milan, Florence, next—filthy weather at them all. Then Rome."

"Ah—Rome! The glories of the Eternal City," cries Hetty, adjusting her bracelet, and giving a glance at the door, her thoughts still running upon viscounts.

"Well, I don't know that I detested it as much as the rest of Italy," Jack proceeds. "I met with fellows I knew there, and we had something like sport to kill the time with. Still, Rome is a deuced slow place to stop in. Boring about catacombs and coliseums may be very well for a couple of days; but when you have done one ruin you have done them all. And as to the club—I never saw anything that you could really call play there, from first to last. No, the only place I could abide, out of the lot, was

Monaco. We stopped there a fortnight on our way back lost a pot of money between us, I can tell you, for Mrs. Chamberlayne is as big a gambler as you ever saw ; but on the whole it was not as deadly as the rest. We had no rain at Monaco, at least, and no ruins."

"I *cannot* imagine a *woman* finding pleasure in gambling!" says Hetty, with her cruel little italics. "But then I am so thoroughly English in my tastes. Now, tell me truly, Mr. Chamberlayne, do you like the sight of a woman gambling?"

"I like the sight of a pretty woman doing anything," says Jack. "And in the case of a wife, I doubly like the sight of her doing anything that has the effect of putting her in a good humour. Ah, here you are Bell!" jumping up with such alacrity as to send the rocking-chair flying. "I was just beginning to think you had forgotten the hour."

And upon this, the figure of a new guest enters the room; a slight, upright figure, equipped in clouds of billowy black tulle, with here and there an artistic touch of scarlet—and diamonds.

“I could have told by instinct who it was, even had Mrs. Baltimore’s name not been announced,” says Hetty, afterwards. “Those diamonds were either real or false. If they were false—I have heard my mamma declare that the wearing of sham jewels is the most unerring index we possess to a woman’s character. If they were real—we all know that such a display, by daylight, is simply the mark of a class.”

So Bell must have fared indifferently had she been on trial—for the crime of witchcraft, say—with Hetty Robarts as her judge!



CHAPTER IX.

ON FINAL CAUSES.

“**H**ETTY, my dear,” cries Jack, “let me introduce my cousin, Mrs. Baltimore. Bell, Mrs. Robarts—another cousin. Upon my word, it seems that we are all cousins together, after a fashion.”

Hetty inclines her head, just sufficiently to bring the movement within the outside limits of a salutation. Bell, in return, gives a frozen stare out of her half-shut blue eyes, and moves away, with a smile, to Jack’s

side. Mr. Robarts looks sheepish, as most men do when these kind of feminine amenities are brought unmistakably beneath their notice. Happily, before matters have had time to grow serious, the announcement of Lord Stair's name causes Hetty's muscles to relax from their rigidity, and in another minute a door at the farther end of the room opens. There is the soft frou-frou of silk—Leah enters; and even Mr. Robarts, despite the presence of his own lawful Hetty—even Mr. Robarts, hardened man of briefs and parchment though he be, is sensible that with her come freshness, perfume, music, all the exquisite poetry that a lovely woman in her youth can shed upon our commonplace unlovely life.

Her dress, a hundred-guinea trifle of Worth's, is a combination of white and amber (Leah's old colours), relieved by ruffles of fine lace at the throat and sleeves. A dress very different in cut and texture to

those poor silks at six francs a yard that Leah Pascal used to make up with her own hands in her days of poverty! Her complexion, though purely clear as ever, has lost a little of its look of health, perhaps may go from white to red more quickly than it was wont. The golden-brown eyes have in them a keener expression than of old; almost you might call the expression one of pain if you were disposed to be hypercritical; and her cheek, by just a shade, has lost its roundness. The drudgery of a London June, the wear and tear of that hard work called pleasure already tell; and yet—yet is Leah Chamberlayne handsomer far than was Leah Pascal! What the face once wanted it has gained. On the transparent cheek, and through the saddened eyes the soul's expansion is beginning, tardily, to shine.

“Better late than never,” cries Jack, sharply, as he pauses for a moment in his

whispers to Bell. "Mrs. Chamberlayne, my cousin Robarts, and Hetty."

Leah advances, with an outstretched hand of conciliation. "So very glad to meet you, Hetty. I may say 'Hetty,' may I not? How do you do, Mr. Robarts. I know both of you well from the photographs in Jack's book. Ah, Lord Stair!" recognising his lordship by a friendly little smile, but no shake of the hand. "Let me introduce Lord Stair—Mrs. Robarts, Mr. Robarts."

It is obvious, then, that Leah and Lord Stair have already met to-day! Hetty records this, as she records other trifling details on her brain's tablet, for future use.

Dinner is announced almost immediately, and Jack, who never acknowledges any law of etiquette save his own immediate amusement, gives his arm, not to Mrs. Robarts, the guest of honour, but to Bell Baltimore. Thus Lord Stair has to take Hetty, and

Leah falls to Mr. Robarts. The party, however, is so small that conversation must, perforce, be general during dinner. And a curious polyglot of conversation it is ! Mrs. Baltimore and Jack Chamberlayne talk openly and freely for their own edification—the royal legend of England their motto. Hetty, with rather limited success, attempts Shakespeare and the musical glasses for Lord Stair ; Mr. Robarts eats his dinner, and falls at every minute into deeper admiration of his hostess. Leah, herself, is simply charming—I must for once borrow Colonel Pascal's word—to everybody. She smiles at the jests of her husband and Bell Baltimore, yet by the smile refines them ; talks nearly up to the requisite intellectual mark with Hetty ; subjugates Mr. Robarts as we have seen, and keeps Lord Stair—although she scarcely seems to address a word to him—in good temper with himself and with her. The majority of neophytes must serve an appren-

ticship, oftentimes a long and weary one, before they can command this kind of tone, "the polite jargon," as our grandfathers called it, "of good company." To Leah none has been necessary. She is well bred by temperament, mistress without effort or consciousness of the art of putting others at their ease; that art which, whether you term it tact or veneer, is practically about the most desirable in the world for a woman belonging to yourself to possess.

So, in spite of polyglot conversation and warring elements, the dinner passes off well. One of Jack Chamberlayne's few virtues is a horror, amounting to eccentricity, of sham or show. None of your *dîners Russe*, with floral decorations, and delicate pink paper menus for Jack. He will give his friends the best meat, fish, and game in season, plainly served, and accompanied by as good a bottle of wine as money can buy; but all in the rough. By his special orders one

servant only must enter the room at a time ; there is no ornament but snowy damask on the table ; and dessert is served, as it used to be when Jack was a small boy, on the mahogany. This kind of dinner puts men in spirits. We all love art and elegance, of course, but still we all feel relieved, as of a load, when, just for once, art and elegance are put aside. By the time they arrive at their strawberries even Lord Stair has grown talkative, and Mr. Robarts—Mr. Robarts has volunteered two distinct and original remarks, without reference to his wife !

“ Every one in town has heard this nice little scandal about the Lyttons, I suppose,” cries Bell Baltimore. Very sweet is Bell in voice and manner ; experience has taught her when she cannot slay to smile ; yet how thoroughly does the tone of that word “ every one ” make Hetty Robarts feel herself classed among the great army of the world’s nobodies ! “ You must remember

Tom Lytton, of the Greys, Lord Stair? He married the second Sparkes girl, last winter."

"Tom Lytton has sent the second Sparkes girl back to her mamma, has he not?" says Lord Stair. "I heard something about it this afternoon at the club."

"What—Lulu Sparkes?" asks Jack, with more interest than he usually shows in any scandal of the moment. "Was that the girl we used to see at Scarborough, Bell—the girl with fair hair who was so sweet upon her cousin Conway?"

"The very same," Bell answers. "Everybody in London knew about the attachment, except Tom Lytton, who had just come back with his regiment from India. And now, six months after their marriage, the whole buried romance has, it seems, come to his knowledge. Letters, even, containing vows of eternal fidelity (it really was only an innocent boy-and-girl flirtation—Teddy Con-

way is not two-and-twenty yet,) locks of hair, dried flowers. Why will people persist in keeping locks of hair and dried flowers? There is a frightful domestic scene. Lulu confesses. Lulu's mamma confesses. Why will people persist in making confessions? And then Mrs. Lytton finds herself quietly sent back 'for a lengthened visit' to her own people. I call it hard."

"I call it just," says Jack, the blood rising over his thin face. "Innocent boy-and-girl flirtation, indeed! I don't believe in innocent flirtations. If I found that my wife had compromised herself before she married, I would do the same. I say that a man's honour is as much affected by the follies of a woman's past life as by those of her present one."

Not a fluctuation of colour comes to Leah's cheek, not the shade of a quiver round Leah's lips. Only she gives one rapid instinctive glance at Lord Stair, *who watches*

her, and her eyes sinkaga in upon her strawberries. "The follies of a woman's past life." Her one supreme, all-compromising folly—the starlit walk in the Champs Elysées, the café chantant, the dress with the fatal golden mouches . . . every detail of that October night, rises up before her, illumined by the sharp white light of sudden terror! She knows what kind of generosity she might look for, should discovery come from her husband; realizes, as she never realized before, how utterly, if indeed he recognized her, her fate, her honour, rest in Lord Stair's hands.

Lord Stair laughs, in his silent, well-bred way. His face is amiably expressionless as that of a royal prince at a ceremony. "And I, Chamberlayne, when I marry, shall concern myself no more with the past than with the present. Absolute liberty, perfect reliance on both sides, is my ideal of wedded happiness."

"Naturally. I talked in the same fine

way myself when I was a bachelor," growls Jack.

"And, however you may talk, you think in the same fine way still," cries Bell, resting her white hand an instant on Jack Chamberlayne's arm. "You never could hope to succeed in the tragic line, Jack," she adds, pleasantly. "And as I really am too good-hearted to enjoy my friends' failures, I warn you, in time, not to attempt it."

Everyone laughs, except Mrs. Robarts. Oh, the stab a woman can inflict when she chooses by not laughing! and with some adroit little remark from Lord Stair the conversation changes; changes, but by no means fades from Mrs. Hetty's remembrance.

"And if ever two people trod the high road to ruin, your cousin Jack and his wife are treading it now." Thus she remarks, in matrimonial confidence, as "our brougham"

rolls back to Bayswater. "Oh, I know what you will say, Charles—you have had a wider experience of life than mine. You hold your own latitudinarian notions, of course, and you have had experience of the *half-world*, as it is called, which, I am thankful to say, I am without ; so I cannot expect you to feel as shocked and disgusted with the whole entertainment as I do."

Mr. Robarts arouses himself from his nap in the corner of the brougham, a nap in which he still hears the low fresh tones of Leah's voice, and feels the magic of her glance. "Disgusted? Why, Hetty, I thought we never spent a jollier little evening. You got on pretty well with Lord Stair at dinner, did you not?"

"Lord Stair was exceedingly glad to make my acquaintance—quite surprising how many mutual acquaintance we found to talk about. Indeed, on my mamma's side I am by no means sure there is not a relationship. It

struck me, Charles, whatever you may think, that Lord Stair must have been taken aback at seeing a person like myself in such company?"

"It struck me that Lord Stair pays more devoted attention than is strictly necessary to Leah," says Mr. Robarts, sleepily. "But really, amongst these sorts of people——"

"'Leah'! What in the world do you mean, Mr. Robarts, by speaking of your cousin's wife as 'Leah'? We may dine with the Chamberlaynes, it may possibly be our duty to ask them to dinner in return—it is perfectly unnecessary that we should ever be on terms of familiarity with either of them—with her, especially. Talking of familiarity reminds me of something which you probably did not observe. Lord Stair *twice* called Mrs. Chamberlayne by her Christian name. To me that is all-sufficient. Delicately placed as we are, and considering

that you are still the presumptive heir to the Chamberlayne property; I have no alternative but to know her——”

“It is a very pleasant alternative, Hetty. I say nothing about moralities—I don’t meddle in matters too high for me; but, as regards the surface only, Jack’s wife seems to me one of the nicest women we have met for a long time.”

“She is intensely artificial,” says Hetty. “Not a look, or tone, or movement but is studied. Her spirits are forced. The very colour on her cheek goes or comes at command. And what extraordinary yellow eyes! And then the unmistakable nose! You may be certain Lord Stair does not admire her, really.”

“Ah! you think so.”

“But alas! a married woman who lays herself out for it, can always command *a certain kind* of attention. I was surprised, Mr. Robarts, to see you shake that

other creature's hand when we came away."

"As you had passed her without bowing, my dear Hetty, and as the other creature had the good feeling and forgiveness to hold out her hand to me, it would have been rather difficult for me to do otherwise."

"It is never difficult, Charles, to do the thing that is right. Mrs. Baltimore is . . . no, I have no language in which to speak of Mrs. Baltimore. Those diamonds, those manners! Putting her hand on your cousin's shoulder, calling him 'Jack' before us all. And then the style, the nature of her stories. Pray, what did you think of Mr. Chamberlayne's comments upon the nice little scandal about the Lyttons?"

"I thought Jack spoke like what he is—a fool," answers Mr. Roberts, laconically. "The man's tone, if not his actual speech, fell scarcely short of an inuendo against his own wife."

"Ah," says Hetty, with mournful resignation, "You must remember we do not know all. Poor, unfortunate young man! We do not know all."

"Poor, unfortunate young woman, you might rather say," returns Mr. Robarts. "If it were possible for you, once in your life, to feel compassion for any member of your own sex, Hetty, you might well pity the wife of Jack Chamberlayne. You remarked, a moment ago, that her spirits were forced. Add something more. Say that there is the look of a broken heart on that girl's face already!"

"I pity no willing victims," cries Hetty, coldly. "When I see misery fall on persons who desecrate the *finest feelings* of human nature by making a mercenary marriage, I say, 'Amen.' They have deserved it."

Mr. Robarts is silent. It may be that this little commination has thrust home with

truer aim, bitterer emphasis, than Hetty herself suspects.

Meanwhile the departed guests undergo lively vivisection at the hands of the friends left behind in Piccadilly.

"Thank heaven, we can breathe once more!" cries Bell, jumping up and adjusting her opera cloak before a glass. "When next I go to an improving lecture, I shall sympathise with the unfortunate frogs under the air-pump. Hetty is a person who exhausts all the moral oxygen out of the atmosphere."

"I admire Mrs. Robarts immensely," says Lord Stair, in his gravest voice. "Mrs. Robarts has taught me a great deal about Egyptian potteries, and I am asked to an æsthetic tea at her house on Wednesday week. Mrs. Baltimore, I hope I am to have the pleasure of meeting you?"

"At the æsthetic tea? Why, did you not

see—Hetty cut me dead before she left! Jack, my dear boy, don't introduce me to your relations another time until you have clearly ascertained whether they desire to know me or not. If the game had only been worth the candle"—Bell puts her blonde head on one side, and looks pensive—"if the game had only been worth playing, I would have made friends with Mr. Robarts, for Hetty's punishment! Whenever a man says 'My dear' to his wife in the kind of tone he says it to Hetty, I feel sure he is a poor creature whom five minutes' temptation would bring to the gallows."

"And he was a rattling good fellow, too, before marriage spoilt him, as it does the rest of us," remarks Jack. Wiser people, when they have drawn a blank in the great lottery, abstain, as a rule, from railing against the lottery system in general. Poor, stupid, straight-forward Jack never loses a chance of having a fling at marriage and the

unhappiness of married men. "When I was a youngster, coming up from school, there was not a better fellow going than Charlie Robarts. Great hand at theatrical matters; knew what was going on in every theatre in town—why, and wrote a play himself, though I can't say it had much of a run! And fond of a jolly game of loo—yes, and a hard drinker, too." Jack shakes his head despondently as he thinks of the fine qualities that time and marriage have spoiled in his cousin's disposition. "And now, when he is home from work, Hetty sends him out to mind the children. I have seen him often, of a Sunday morning, in Kensington Gardens, with the nursemaids and perambulators."

"In the present state of society, perambulators appear to be the final cause of the hardworking barrister," cries Bell, with her little decisive air of flippant irony. "Lord Stair, you are going to hear Nilsson to-night?"

No. Then, Jack, I have no choice left me but to run away with you. Oh, I know you are not in evening dress, but you can see me as far as the door of the opera-house, at least. It will not take you out of your way."

And Jack has to obey with as good a grace as he can command. He likes Mrs. Baltimore better than most people: he likes loo and lansquenet better than Mrs. Baltimore; and the opera-house does not lie on the direct road between Piccadilly and St. James's Street.

So Lord Stair and his hostess are left alone.

"Talking of final causes—if one could only discover the final cause of a Bell Baltimore!" remarks Lord Stair.



CHAPTER X.

THE MOON, SO-CALLED, OF HONEY.

TO some human creatures folly means pleasure; "the more they drink of the world the more it intoxicateth." To others folly is education; perilous, but necessary. Jack Chamberlayne belongs to the class of men who turn day into night, frequent music-halls, drink, smoke, beggar themselves over the card-table from habit; hating the fatal routine as no hired labourer ever hated his day's work, however nauseous.

A perfectly hopeless class, aware, themselves, of their own hopelessness.

"Turn over a new leaf!" thus Jack will answer friend or physican who attempts to reason with him. "Drink a cup of water-gruel and to bed at ten, and for what? I don't care a straw whether I live or die—the pace which finishes me soonest will suit my book best. The duty I owe to others? As long as I contrive to live till my next birthday, and keep well out of the way meanwhile, 'others' will not complain, depend upon it."

And yet, when he and Leah drove away from Madame Bonchrétien's door on that October evening we know of, the germs of better resolves were in Jack Chamberlayne's breast. Mentally and physically, never was man of five-and-twenty more irreclaimably lost than he; and still, in the very depths of Jack's moral nature there were places that the cankerworm had not touched—greener places

than many a so-called healthy organization can boast. He forsook his bride of an hour to run after Rose the chambermaid, prompted by the same school-boy spirit in which, had occasion permitted, he would have hiccupped forth the 'Ten Little Niggers' at the wedding feast. Before half the hymeneal moon had waned, he had transgressed every limit of good taste and sober sense. But in his heart—Jack Chamberlayne's weed-choked heart!—was honest love for his wife, determination, just as sincere as though he had been the possessor of virtues and ability, to make her happy.

If Leah could have dissembled better—she who in all life's graceful trivialities dissembled to such nice perfection! Alas, to feign affection at every hour of the twenty-four; to find talk, Bell Baltimore's style of talk, for a companion, brainless even in the intervals when what intelligence he had was not overclouded by wine; to sympathize, or seem

to sympathize, with his interests ; to think down to the level of his thoughts :—*this* was beyond her strength !

Had she never met Danton, never woke through love to remorse, she might possibly have laboured with less self-reproachful earnestness to sustain the burthen of her new duties, and while she laboured less have succeeded better. As it was, they had not been married a week before Jack, with all his dullness, began to discern that every hour, every minute of Leah's existence was a piece of studied, albeit conscientious, acting. He had known her, in the days of their engagement, changeable, petulant, imperious—bewitching always ; and was prepared for the same kind of qualities in her as a wife. These he could have comprehended. Leah Pascal, with her power of alternate torture and fascination, was, at least, a flesh-and-blood angel, set apart (if set apart at all) by a line too delicate for his

discernment from the angels of his own past experience. Of Leah Chamberlayne—gentle, patient, icily submissive to his smallest whim or wish—Jack understood no more than he did of any stone goddess in the galleries through which, yawning and martyred, he found himself forced to loiter during the first miserable weeks of his marriage.

What was it that set the Leah he had won so irreconcilably at odds with the Leah he had courted? Did the fault lie in himself? Jack had graduated long before in the school of cheap, Saturday cynicism; knew the stock maxims by heart about woman, her master, and the curiously tonic qualities of neglect, when exhibited by husbands. So he tried the experiment of neglect! And after leaving his bride alone for half a day or more, would find her, on his return, gentle, patient, submissive, as was her habit, with a look sometimes about the eyelids that told of tears, and occasionally so far oblivious

of her duty as never to inquire what had kept her lord from her side so long. Had she had some old love affair of which he knew not? Difficult even for jealousy to credit that Leah Pascal, as Jack first saw her at Scarborough under the wing of Mrs. Baltimore, could have been a victim to romantic sentiment in any shape. But since—had that flirtation with Lord Stair in Paris left a deeper mark upon her memory than she would have him think?

Mr. Chamberlayne busied himself over this last idea, magnified remembered trifles, coined others, with as much consistency, as varied powers of self-torture, as though he had been a man of the finest order of intellect. At length enlightenment blazed upon him suddenly, and with such concentrated force as to shrivel up doubt, uncertainty—alas, and with them his last lingering belief in Leah for evermore!

It was one blue spring midday in Rome.

Their life, I should say, had taken a somewhat better turn since they arrived in Rome. English beer could be had in the Eternal City, and rats ; and a special turn of fortune had thrown Jack across an old school friend possessing congenial tastes — and terriers. Resources like these at least robbed Mr. Chamberlayne's days of the hideous monotony that had crushed him at the Italian lakes and in Florence, while at the same time they brought something like liberty to his wife. If ruins and picture-galleries yielded her pleasure, in Heaven's name let her make the most of it—with a hired cicerone. Jack, for one, was never going to pretend a love for antiquities and such "bosh" again ! And with a sense of healthier interest than she had taken in anything since her marriage, Leah ere long began to avail herself of this grudgingly accorded freedom.

She was too profoundly unread, thanks to Colonel Pascal's system of female education,

to derive the keen delight born of association from what she saw. But to a bruised spirit, with or without the higher help of knowledge, the mere breathing of Roman air is medicine. Laocoon's torture, the Gladiator's death-swoon, bore scarcely more significance to Leah than the biscuit shepherdesses or painted fans of a Parisian toy-stall. The subtle poetry of external Rome—its magnificence and meanness, its noble breathing past, its sordid, pulseless present, touched her only remotely. And still, day by day, she felt that her pain lessened, that the imperfections of her own span of existence became vague and unsubstantial in the presence of all these centuries whose foot-prints lay around her. During her life's one hour of poetry, under the chestnuts in the Tuileries, Danton had spoken of Rome, and of how one day they would wander amidst its marvels together. And in this remembrance, unacknowledged, possibly, by her-

self, there was another source of semi-bitter balm. If she had had the strength to accept him and poverty, they might have been standing now under this Italian sky, arm clasped in arm, heart answering to heart, intelligence to intelligence. For she *would* have risen—vain dream of every woman who has made a mistaken marriage—she *would* have risen, through the force of affection alone, to the level of the man she loved; would have seen through his eyes, thought through his thoughts, sufficiently at least, to learn, and so yield him the sweets of perfect companionship.

The pathetic contrast of her actual loneliness, a hired cicerone, or 'Bradshaw,' for her guide, her husband elsewhere engaged with beer and terriers, would bring a choking sensation in Leah's breast—tears, unbidden, to her eyes. Still, the pain, the tears, were healing ones. The moment that regret can become associated with some

new source of wholesome daily pleasure, we have advanced one stage upon the road to consolation. Leah grew to look forward to each fresh morning's occupation ; Mr. Chamberlayne continued to kill time and rats, quiescent, if not amused. And then came the unhappy accident that upset everything. Returning unexpectedly to their lodging in the Piazza di Spagna, one blue spring mid-day, Jack found his wife alone, weeping passionately, an open letter between her hands.

To dull, furtive tear-shedding, or rather to the tell-tale signs of such, Jack had grown tolerably hardened. This was the first time in his married experience that he had witnessed any outburst of a demonstrative or open kind from Leah ; and he insisted—had he not the right?—upon knowing what was the meaning of it. From whom was the letter ? What ! had it got to this already—that she carried on a clandestine correspon-

dence, received letters unknown to him, without his sanction ! Jack's lips grew white with anger, as he stood, prophetically conscious, perhaps, of the kind of revelation that was approaching.

Coldly, articulately, came Leah's answer to her husband ; a spot like fire starting on each pale cheek as she spoke. Her correspondent was no clandestine one, but her own sister. Oh ! if he doubted, let him look—at *that* distance, no nearer—at the big child's text in which Deb's envelope was directed.

"And a letter from your sister has had the effect of upsetting you like this?" demanded Jack. "A letter, without enclosure, from little Deb?"

"Most undoubtedly," was Leah's reply. "Surely, so much of liberty may be left to me. I may receive what letters from the children I choose, and shed tears over them, or not, at my pleasure."

And then she first came to see of what materials, truly, her lord and master was made. Setting himself straight before her, his weak face distorted by passion, such as I believe only these weak faces can wear, Jack, with a great oath, demanded that the letter should be given into his hands. Family affection—love for her little sisters! Let that story be told to someone else, not him. He had had too many samples already of the affections of the Pascal family! *He* knew them, from the father downwards! Cry over the dear children's letters? Leah had been willing enough to get away from the dear children at any price, and with no tear-shedding at all. He would find her weeping next over one of her papa's begging letters—those touching appeals in the shape of unpaid milliners' bills with which Colonel Pascal (alas! this was but too true) was beginning to pursue them on their wedding tour—with more of a like nature. It was

the first time Jack had found an opportunity of thoroughly relieving his mind since his marriage; and you may be sure he told his bride a great many more truths than I should think it pleasant or edifying to record.

Well, and when he had quite finished, Leah answered him, courteously, quietly—when are the deeply-stricken loud? There was justice in much that Jack had said. Or all women living, she was the last to be free of self-reproach, and it was her intention, her hope, to fulfil her duty as a wife to the uttermost, and he should *not* see that letter! No, by the heaven that made them both, he should not! The right to correspond with her own family, at her own pleasure, was hers, and he should respect it.

Little was she prepared for the storm that followed. Colonel Pascal, in his worst altercations with his daughters, was never a violent man. Bitter, sarcastic, mean—these

things, under provocation, could the Prince Charming be. Outwardly, he remained a gentleman, always; kept his language under command as perfect as he kept his feelings. Jack Chamberlayne had no more self-control than has a froward, reasonless child. What, in truth, was he but a froward, reasonless child!

"Right!" he exclaimed vehemently. "You talk in this fine strain of right to me—when you owe me *everything*! You, yes, and your father, and sisters as well. A set of paupers all round! But we shall soon see who is to be master of us two!"

And thus speaking, and ere she could sufficiently divine the meditated treachery to guard against it, he had snatched the letter by force out of his wife's hand.

"Read it, then," cried Leah, with bloodless lips, a glitter that boded no good coming in her eyes. "You will not be much the wiser or the happier, afterwards—but that

is your concern, not mine. Read it, and bear the consequences !”

And Jack obeyed her.

Clearly, ineffaceably, did every smallest detail of that scene and moment engrave itself on Leah’s brain. The bare, vaulted room, with the patch of sapphire showing through the open casement; the immense seven-storied, yellow-washed palaces across the Piazza; the chattering of busy Roman tongues from the thoroughfare beneath; yes—even to the song that a caged bird was pouring forth on the blue air from a window above—she remembered all !

“My dear, dear, old Leah.” This was Deb’s letter, written in straggling round-hand, with precarious punctuation and arbitrary capitals. “I am glad that you like roam, and jack’s cough is better, what fun for him to have ratcatching. Only I am sorry for the Rats, and I should like to see san-petres. Naomi has got a new spring dress

and I am to have her old one full of wholes and Greese. I wish you had never married jack, for if you had married M. Danton you might have taken me away from papa at wonce. I go in his room very often, and he sings the songs he sung That sunday, and I gave him your Foto. And he looks ill. And madame says M. Danton has never been the same man since Miss Leah married, and Désiré has grown so big out of his jackets madame says she must have a N w Boy. My dear, dear Leah. I shall like to stay with you in London, and have a riding-habbit made by the tayler, and I have had one of my *worse attacks*. And Danton nursed me like you, and so no more from your loving little sister, d. Pascal."

"My love to jack he has come in with some Violettes and I send 2 or 3 and he hopes you are happy. From Deb."

Twice Jack Chamberlayne read the letter through, searching at every word for his

rival, Lord Stair's, name, and finding nothing. He read it a third time before the truth—the disgraceful, damning truth, so he held it—broke upon his slow intelligence. Leah, his wife, had loved, not Lord Stair, but this man Danton!—a foreigner, a penniless medical student, a musician!

Fury, horrible to behold, distorted poor Jack's face. He tore the letter into shreds; he ground it, and the violets, under his heel—danced upon them. Then, his first passion a little spent, he came up, threateningly close, to Leah's side.

“And so that was your secret, was it, Lord Stair the blind? You, a girl decently brought up, the daughter of a man calling himself a gentleman, you carried on a love-intrigue with that scoundrel Danton, at the time you were engaged to me, at the time you and your father were rifling my pockets—eh?”

No answer to this. Leah just stood pas-

sive, stony; ready to receive his insults, or, if it should please him better so to vent his sense of injury, his blows.

"Swear on your oath," cried Jack, transported beyond every bound of reason by the suddenness of the discovery that had come upon him, "Swear on your oath that you never loved this man, never encouraged his intentions, unless you want me to kill you as you stand there!"

"I will swear no oath at all," was Leah's reply. "And don't let us have any nonsense about 'killing,' please. Nothing of that kind ever affects my nerves. What good is life to me? What happiness have I in life? People seldom gain by dishonourable actions, I begin to see—one can learn so much in a few short months or weeks! Well, and you have not profited by reading a letter you had no right to read. The thing is over."

"Over! By the Lord!" exclaimed Jack

Chamberlayne, his face drawn and white with rage ; " I don't know what you mean by over ! I call it just begun. You refuse to swear ? I give you one chance more."

" Most certainly I refuse. You read a letter which it was an act of dishonesty in you to read. Interpret its contents in any way you choose—but without help from me. I have perjured myself enough already for one lifetime."

" And loving him, encouraging him—aye, for I can see it all now—' the songs he sung that Sunday ;' I remember another song he sung upon your wedding-day—you felt no shame, oh my God !" cried poor Jack with trembling lips, " no shame, no remorse, in marrying me ?"

" If I did not," answered Leah, her head drooping upon her breast. " I shall find shame and remorse enough for the remainder of my life, be quite sure."

So the scene came to an end, barring some ugly last words of Jack's that do not need setting down. And Leah found herself alone again, blankly gazing from her window at the sapphire sky and yellow-washed palaces, and broad steps leading upward from the Piazza to the brow of the Pincian Hill.

Long did she stand thus: tearless, white, still,—stupefied, one who watched her might have said, rather than undergoing any acute or passionate pain. Then, in a mechanical sort of way, she stooped, picked up the fragments of little Deb's letter, and the violets that Mr. Chamberlayne's dishonouring heel had ground into shreds. Every smallest object reminding her of Danton—his one letter, of six words, the withered Gloire de Dijon roses—Leah, since her marriage, had conscientiously destroyed. But these few torn violet petals she hid away; can never look at now (nay, can

scarce smell violets in the street) without all that morning's scene, the vaulted Roman room, the snatch of glowing sky, the song of the wild-bird from his prison, coming back upon her mind !

Well, and after this—after this, I am far from saying that Leah made no more efforts along the dreary uphill path of duty. What was her whole life save one dread effort? But she left off being patient, and it was better so. That virtue of absolute patience is at all times too nearly akin to despair for moral health. When Mr. Chamberlayne would heap his miserable insults upon her, or rather upon Danton—his wife's secret discovered, and Jack seemed never to weary of this employment—she got into the habit of answering him, with few words well chosen; words tacitly admitting the justice of his reproaches, and that stabbed Jack's ruined heart like a knife. After a time she began to amuse herself; to appear on the

Corso, or in the Pincian gardens, at fashionable hours; regained an interest, dead since her marriage, in millinery; made acquaintance with the crowd of English, from whom hitherto she had held coldly aloof; by-and-by, picnicked on the Campagna, saw the Coliseum by moonlight, visited the ateliers, and danced at the Quirinal with the rest—had two or three devoted admirers, even, Roman and English; can a fair woman exist without admiration any more than she can exist without a shadow?

At all this Jack looked on, sullen, morose—jealous (of any man nearer than the Rue Castiglione) never! His instincts, unalloyed by reason, were on some points correct as a child's. Knowing the one bare, intolerable truth as he knew it, no smaller doubt or suspicion could have place in his mind. The Anglo-Roman world might whisper this thing or that of Mrs. Chamberlayne; her admirers might hope, despair, hope again, by

turns. Jack, with his narrow vision, his dull weak brain, knew better than them all. Leah might dance, dress, conquer as she chose, and her husband stood by—more frequently did not stand by—with the same apathetic indifference to her actions. What need for a husband to watch a wife whose heart was sentinelled like Leah's! What mattered her heart to him! What mattered anything, save to drink the drugs of his own poisoned life with as much haste as possible—make the most of all opportunity for self-forgetfulness that might come to his hand!

They left Rome in April. They visited Monaco. You have heard Jack speak of Monaco, and of Leah's newly-developed faculty for gambling. And then came their journey home to London, where ruin-made easy lay pleasantly open for either of them, or both. The world, ever ready with its gift of prophecy, thought for *both*. The

season of their return was May; a blue sky, or such pale smoke-hue as in England is accounted blue, overhead; the trees clean; the east wind searching men's lungs and tempers; the sparrows chirping out their hopes, and seeing to their nests on the house-tops. What kind of nest should this pair of newly-matched love-birds inhabit?

Lord Stair's practical advice helped them in this, as in most things—by good chance, as regarded Leah's visiting list, a favourable turn in his lordship's money matters gave him the prospect of spending the summer in London. Lord Stair met the pilgrims on the platform at Victoria; dined with them; that very evening, Jack too wearied to stir out after the journey, escorted Leah to the Opera, where all the world was hearing Patti's first song of the season. By the end of a week he had installed them in their hotel, put Jack in the way of losing any amount of money

he chose, in good company—there is the advantage of having a man of rank for your friend!—and caused at least six ladies of quality, if not of character, to leave their cards with the hall-porter at Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne's hotel. By the end of a fortnight, Leah began to "float." The name of the new beauty was already a familiar word upon the lips of idle London; and the name of the new beauty was seldom spoken in club, park, or ball-room, unaccompanied by that of Lord Stair. The programme chalked out by Milor eight months before in Paris so far working to admiration.

To float! With a husband sullenly acquiescent like Jack, with a friend as much in earnest and as powerful as Lord Stair, what should Leah do but float along the rapids of folly on which she had embarked? During the first months of her marriage the newness of her pain had been sufficient to occupy

her. She was *accustomed* to everything now ; to Jack, and Jack's violence, and her own self-loathing, and the constant weight upon the heart—the days that dread the morrow, the blank awakening to each new morning of a loveless, emasculated life. Ah ! Heaven one must have excitement when it comes to this : drug memory, slay regret, by whatever means come readiest ! Surely, in this all-whirling, all-forgetting London, there can be no space for the ghosts that haunt her with such stubborn pertinacity. That starlit walk in the garden of the Tuileries, that farewell hour in the atelier . . . absurd to think such memories cannot be lived down ! Why, look at half the women of good position that one meets—women well contented with the day's labour and day's wages of their life ! Look at the faces, “ beautiful with plast'ring art,” that smile on you from gay equipages in the Park and Row. Were these, do you suppose, never tear-stained,

never pale with remorse over some girlish love, whose murder was necessary before gay equipages and good position could be attained at all?

Float along the rapids; every day faster. So things have gone on for a fair number of weeks now. Ball-going men fight for Mrs. Chamberlayne's round dances; ball-givers (without daughters, especially) are eager to secure her for their entertainments. At the Derby, Hurlingham, the four-in-hand meetings in Hyde Park—wherever she appears—Mrs. Chamberlayne is pronounced the prettiest woman present. More than once she has waltzed with royalty; if Fate prove propitious, may even be seen at the great Duchess of St. Ives' approaching ball, through Lord Stair's influence. And still memory refuses to be drugged, and regret dies not.

"Something wrong in the digestion, depend upon it," said Bell Baltimore, when

Leah once whispered a hint of her soul's sickness to her friend. "You want tonics. Centuries ago, I, too, had my attack of Wertherism, as you know . . . well, and nothing saved my complexion but arsenic, in tiny doses."

"I think arsenic in large doses would be a far surer cure for my complaint," was Leah answer.





CHAPTER XI.

A TAME CAT.

“IF one could discover the final cause of a Bell Baltimore.”

So speaks Lord Stair, when Bell, in her sweep of vanity, the dusky effulgence of her black lace and diamonds, has floated away out of the room on her host’s not-too-ready arm.

“Final causes are quite beyond the range of my intellect,” answers Leah. “Bell’s present effect is the delightful one of amusing

unamuseable people, Jack especially. The god-send she was at dinner! How could we have supported three mortal hours of Hetty and Hetty's husband, without Bell's little stories to keep us all awake?"

"The little story of Tom Lytton and his wife, for example. Apropos—no, *not* apropos of Tom Lytton and his wife," says Lord Stair, taking up his crush-hat, but showing no other signs of departure, "I have heard some news that you and Jack will be interested in, Mrs. Chamberlayne. I quite forgot to tell you about it sooner."

"My prophetic soul forewarns me—the Duchess of St. Ives!" cries Leah. "The Duchess of St. Ives and her daughter will have nothing to do with such obscure persons as Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne, but Lord Stair has not moral courage sufficient to say so. Never mind our feelings," she adds, lightly. "Æsthetic Bayswater teas

are safer entertainments, no doubt, than ducal balls, if we could only be content with them."

"The Duchess of St. Ives will act precisely as her friends bid her," answers Lord Stair. "As to Lady Violet—you are right; Lady Violet would gladly have nothing to do with any woman younger and prettier than herself! You have promised to be at the Zoo to-morrow, recollect. Well, and I promise that to-morrow you shall get your invitation, from the Duchess's own lips, if you will. No; my news, such as it is, concerns some one whom we all know and like in Paris."

"You mean Naomi, of course?" Admirably does Leah control her voice, bravely do her eyes meet the tyrant eyes that watch her: yet at the word "Paris," spoken just at this moment by Lord Stair, her heart gives a throb of sudden terror, and he perceives it. Until a woman harden into a

daughter of marble—a veritable Bell Baltimore—there is generally some fluttering bit of lace, or tell-tale trembling end of ribbon, that will betray her secrets. “I had a letter from the Rue Castiglione last week, brimful of exciting intelligence. Papa was actually going to take the poor child to her first ball at the Embassy, and——”

“And I,” says Lord Stair, in his calm voice, “had a letter from the Rue Castiglione last night—the familiar theme, some of those little bills I forgot to pay before I left Paris—and in this letter I hear——”

“Something tremendously important, I am sure, to require so much circumlocution!”

“That our friend, M. Danton, is coming—stay! has come, I fancy—to live in London for good. He has got an appointment as out-surgeon at Guy’s or Bartholomew’s,

I am such a terrible fellow for forgetting details."

Lord Stair, it may be remarked, was never known to forget a detail (or forgive a slight) in his life.

"What a fortunate move for him!" And still there is no outward change in Leah's voice. "With his abilities—there is no doubt he was half a genius!—M. Danton always seemed to me a round peg in a square hole at Madame Bonchrétien's. Afterwards? What is the news Jack and I are to be so deeply interested in?"

"Oh, nothing — nothing more." Lord Stair glances up at the ceiling; takes his crush-hat again between his hands, inspects its quality, then returns it to its place under his arm. "That was a fiery diatribe of Jack's against old loves, was it not?" he goes on, presently, "I never knew before, Leah, that your husband had so much of the hidden Othello in his composition."

“And, as Bell told him, high tragedy is not a line in which Jack would be likely to reap laurels. Now, if it were only you, Lord Stair, it would be different. There are dark unfathomable parts—Wicked Noblemen, in melodrama, and the like—that would suit your talents to a nicety.”

Leah, until now, has been standing at some little distance from Lord Stair. As she speaks, she turns; and, coming nearer to his side, looks up, with a smile such as might almost lose another Troy, into his face. Does that smile betoken coquetry, encouragement, *fear*? To the understanding of feminine human nature, Lord Stair has devoted his forty years of life, not unsuccessfully. And still does the nature of this particular woman remain to him a Sphinx. With Leah Pascal, the girl, he was at no time certain upon what ground he stood. With Leah Chamberlayne, the woman of the world, he is uncertain as to

whether he stands on any ground at all. She never slights him by word or action; never avoids being alone with him; in a ball-room will reject younger men, by the dozen, to accept his attention—nay, avows, openly, that she enjoys his lordship's Mephistophelian criticisms on her friends better than a waltz with the best partner in London. But in her heart—I use the term hesitatingly; Lord Stair does not believe in hearts—what does Leah feel towards the man who holds her, with such cruel certitude, in his power?

“If Jack, instead of the good little lad he is, were the blackest Othello breathing, I, for one, should not be disposed to judge him too harshly. Iago talks, does he not, of ‘a fellow almost damned in a fair wife,’ Well, and I can understand that kind of Hades! I can understand the tortures I should undergo, myself, under such circumstances.”

Leah laughs pleasantly.

"I tell Jack sometimes, that he might pay me the compliment of showing a little deeper concern in my comings and goings than he does, but in vain. You cannot awaken people to a sense of responsibility against their will. Once upon a time, at Madame Bonchrétien's, I would not solemnly declare that Jack was not so much—you see?—just so much, *jealous*." Speaking the word in a whisper, and indicating the fraction of an inch upon one slender finger. "And then suddenly, on a certain fine morning in Rome, if I remember right, I discovered that he had come to his right mind."

"As regards the jealousy, or the object of the jealousy, Mrs. Chamberlayne?"

"Really, Lord Stair, that question, like your remark about final causes, is beyond me." But, do what she will, Leah cannot keep a flush of crimson from staining her cheek at his tone. "'Jealousy, or the

object of the jealousy !' All these high falutin' emotions are so utterly out of my way of life, that I never even trouble my head to think of them. . . Ah, you delicious little morsels !" she breaks off, inclining her face towards the bouquet in Lord Stair's button-hole. "If lillies of the valley were only unattainable, how frantic we should all be about their possession !"

"I don't believe in the word 'unattainable,'" says Lord Stair, speaking below his breath, and looking exceedingly hot and in earnest. "Even as regards the heart of the veriest coquette breathing, I believe—oh, Mrs. Chamberlayne, it would be affectation for you to attempt to misunderstand me any longer. My whole existence is consumed by one thought !" Lord Stair's weight is a solid, rapidly increasing fourteen stone. "Sleeping or waking, one image pursues me—you know too well whose image that is !"

And before Leah can foresee or thwart his intention, he has caught her hand in his, has lifted it, half-way to his lips.

Half-way, only. Leah does not attempt to retreat from him; she feigns neither surprise nor indignation; she simply utters the monosyllable "Oh!" And Lord Stair relinquishes his hold, and at the same time feels more intensely foolish than he was ever made to feel by any utterance of woman's tongue yet.

"Oh, this is amusing, I must say—better comedy than they give us at the theatres. You and I, Lord Stair and Leah Chamberlayne, *at our time of life*, to begin playing at sentimentalities!"

And she laughs, one of those quiet, semi-bitter laughs before which a man's capabilities for saying pretty things shrivel up like a scroll of parchment before the fire.

"Fortunate, at least, that I have it in

my power to divert you, Mrs. Chamberlayne! I was not aware that anything I said would appear so superlatively ridiculous in your sight."

"Ridiculous, to the last point of absurdity, and at the same time, painful. Three words dispose of such a matter with most people. To you I don't want to say those three words—for I like you! I like you," repeats Leah, in that pretty, pleading voice of hers, "and I am grateful."

"Grateful!"

"Exceedingly. But for you, what would have become of me in this great Babylon? Jack's acquaintance are very nice acquaintance, no doubt, for the world they belong to; and on my side I have just got poor Bell Baltimore, who belongs to no world at all! Look what you have done for us!" By a graceful little sweep of the hand she indicates a table filled to overflowing with cards and notes. "Every day a new caller,

every day a new invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne, and through whose thoughtfulness, whose goodness? Why, Lord Stair, we should be the very most ungrateful people living, Jack and I, if we were not profoundly sensible of all we owe to you."

But neither pleading tones nor graceful gestures can blind Lord Stair to the all-galling fact that Leah Chamberlayne, the little roturière whom he has helped so far along the road to popularity, readily appreciative though she may be of his favours, does, in her inmost soul, laugh at and make light of, *him*.

"If you were less grateful, and at the same time less cold, Mrs. Chamberlayne, I should feel myself infinitely better repaid!"

"Cold! And what would you have me be but cold," she exclaims, her bantering manner changing in a moment to one of

gravity. "You know, as well as most people, what our life is—poor Jack's and mine. How can a woman be otherwise than cold who has to tread such a path as I tread? Why, there is my best chance of happiness, you yourself have said so a dozen times. With a heart, an imitation, even, of a heart, I might lose courage altogether. As I am——"

"As you are," interrupts Lord Stair, with well dissembled spontaneity, "thrown away—nay, Leah, for once, I insist upon your listening to me—unvalued, where you should be valued most, and with an intelligence that bonnets and bracelets cannot satisfy—placed in such a position as yours, is the devotion of the one person who adores you a subject altogether for ridicule, do you think?"

"If by devotion you mean honest, common-place friendship——"

"I mean worship, true and tender, as

ever man offered to woman. You know it."

"And common-place friendship is just the only feeling that can touch me. 'Worship, true and tender,' why, it is like a line of poetry, and *I hate* poetry! I can't even listen to such nonsense-talk as you seem in the mood for to-night."

She moves a step away from him, folds her white arms steadily across each other, and so stands: an expression whose chill blank sincerity Lord Stair is far too acute a judge to misinterpret, upon her face.

That expression fires him out of all his habitual self-command.

"And yet, Mrs. Chamberlayne, you were not so impenetrable to softer feeling once! On the night that I saw you at the Café Chantant in Paris—you wore a dress I had a weakness for, I recollect, black, covered over with shining golden spots—on that night, as you stood, your hand within M.

Danton's arm, the lamps shining on your face, I thought if ever there was a face that could make a man's heaven on earth through its tenderness, it was Leah Pascal's."

For a moment every hue of life vanishes from Leah's cheek, her hands droop, cold and nerveless, her breath grows thick. Then the forlorn courage of the helpless comes to her—such courage as the dove shows when she pecks the falcon's talons!

"I have wondered—a good many times—whether you really did recognise me that evening. Deb had been sick during the day, and M. Danton was kind enough to take me out for an hour's fresh air in the Champs Elysées. You must have walked home to the Rue Castiglione pretty quick," she adds—all this in an abrupt, staccato sort of way, without pause or hesitation;—"for by the time I got back you were in the salon, drinking Madame's Sunday punch,

with the old ladies, do you remember, ready to bid me welcome!"

"And from that hour to this have displayed—have I not?—the modest virtue of discretion, at least. Give me credit for the small amount of good there is in me."

"Small amount! Why, I give you credit for every virtue under the sun," she cries. Oh, that Lord Stair could read aright her tone, her glance! "Discretion is but a negative quality. I give you credit for *all* the fine and delicate feelings that should make an honourable man regard another's secret, however it came into his possession, as something sacred."

For a second, a second only, Lord Stair winces. Then—"Secret!" he repeats quietly, "was there ever any secret in the matter? Some of the other people were with you, surely? Naomi, and Mrs. Tomson——"

"M. Danton and I were alone."

"Really? I could almost have sworn to seeing Mrs. Tomson and Naomi—but my wretched memory so often plays me traitor! Supposing a totally different case," he goes on, watching her narrowly. "Supposing—I talk nonsense, I know—that I indeed possessed a secret affecting your happiness, more than your happiness, do you not feel that it would be safe as the grave in my keeping?"

"I—I don't exactly see how it should be to your interest to injure me," says Leah, her eyes sinking beneath his, the colour returning to her cheek.

"Even after such cruelty as you have treated me with to-night? Ah, well, Mrs. Chamberlayne, the first smart of pain is over, and I have learned my lesson! For the future I shall know the exact light in which you regard me—out of 'gratitude.' A harmless old square-toes, good to hold your fan and bouquet while you give away

his dances to younger men, a convenient chaperon for Hurlingham or the theatres in Jack's absence—a tame cat, in short, with claws well sheathed——”

“With claws always ready to make their venom felt, Milor,” interrupts Leah. When they are on their friendliest terms she calls him Milor sometimes, in remembrance of old Paris days, and Lord Stair, you may be sure, accepts the flag of truce that the familiar name holds forth. “Claim any other resemblance to the tame cat that you like—not that one. Your claws are never really sheathed, even in jest.”

“And you will not give me the poor pleasure of saying that you believe in my fidelity? If an occasion arose when it lay in my power to stand between you and harm——”

“So much depends upon what one means by harm, Milor!”

“I mean, at this moment, loss of honour,”

he answers, with grave emphasis. "Not, as you know well, of honour itself, but of good name, the counter that passes current for the genuine coin in the world, and whose loss to most of us, alas! is of greater importance than that of the genuine coin itself."

"Well, if such an emergency should arise," begins Leah solemnly.

"If such an emergency should arise," he whispers.

"I would rather my salvation depended upon myself than upon the fidelity, 'true and tender,' of any living man! That is all. Do you know, Lord Stair, that it is past eleven o'clock, and that I have to elbow my way through old Lady Wallace's crush, and afterwards be seen at these new cotton people's ball of inauguration, before my Saturday night's work is done?"

"In other words—I am dismissed," says Lord Stair. "After all our attempts at

quarrelling, Leah, we part friends? You will keep one dance vacant for me at Lady Wallace's?"

"And as many as you like at the cotton people's—of course, on our usual condition of not dancing them."

But Lord Stair, and a good many younger men than Lord Stair, are doomed to disappointment. Neither at Lady Wallace's crush, nor at the cotton people's inauguration ball, is the fair face of Leah Chamberlayne seen to night.





CHAPTER XII.

"I DARE MOST THINGS."

THE June day-dawn has already begun to break over Green Park by the time that Mr. Chamberlayne returns to his hotel. The driver of his hansom, not unused to performing this office for gentlemen of pleasure towards the small hours, fits the latch-key into the lock for him, and after a good deal of difficulty, a great many mistaken aims, Jack succeeds in lighting a candle at the feeble jet of gas left burning in the hall.

A gentleman of pleasure—*pleasure!* Look at the lad's wan, vacant face, and abstain from ever using that word again, in connection with a life like his. The morning light glances in upon him, cold and ghastly, as, quarrelling with the bannister and the wall alternately, he makes his way upstairs; it falls full upon Leah, who stands at an open door upon the first landing, dressed in her dinner dress as when Jack saw her last, ready to receive him.

"You up still!" he exclaims, suddenly sobered by the unexpectedness of the apparition; for you may believe that burning the wifely rushlight of expectation is not one of Leah's habits. "Why, what the —— does this mean?"

Mr. Chamberlayne's expletives are unwriteable; yet must they occasionally be indicated, if one would do justice to the masculine vigour of his domestic small talk. "I have a word or two to say to you,"

answers Leah, quietly, "and as I was not sleepy, I thought I might as well get them over to-night—or rather this morning. Would you mind coming into the drawing-room?"

Her face has the look about it that Jack dreads, the look it wore at the moment when he ground Danton's violets beneath his heel, and he shrinks, with not unnatural distaste, from the proffered "word or two." Between any husband and any wife explanations at three in the morning, the wife heavy-eyed from watching, the husband, latch-key in hand, could scarcely be reckoned among the genial duties of life. The dim religious light, whether of taper or day-dawn; the ghostly outside silence; the sense of separation between yon two, waking and at war, and the whole big, peaceful, sleeping world—these are influences before which the courage of stronger men than Jack Chamberlayne has been known to wax faint.

"I am sure I can't see," he begins peevishly, "why everything could not as well be said at breakfast—if there is anything to say."

"Only that we never breakfast together," answers Leah, in her clear voice; "and that to-morrow, to-day rather, being Sunday, I shall probably have started for church about an hour-and-a-half before your eyes are open."

"Ah, I forgot that—church. By —, to think of the hypocrisy of women! Church—and such a life as ours!"

However, he turns away from the direction of his own apartment, and, with exceeding ill-grace, enters the drawing-room.

"Let the curtain-lecture be short, Mrs. Chamberlayne," blowing out his candle as he speaks. "It is broad daylight already, and I am by no means in a humour for scenes."

"Curtain-lecture!" She closes the door,

crosses the room with her soft step, and stands before him; lovely, even in this most unlovely hour of the twenty-four, if Jack had but the eyes or soul to see it. "As though there could ever be any danger of lecturing between you and me! People whose thoughts, whose actions, are so entirely their own. No, no, Jack—what I want to speak to you about is . . . a simple question of hospitality."

"Hospitality! I know what you mean by that," he growls. "You intend me to give a ball, a series of balls, to all these fine new friends of yours. Don't consult me about it. Hire any public room you choose for the purpose—Lord Stair will see to details for you—and have the goodness to leave my name out altogether in the matter."

"M. Danton, I am told, is coming to live in London. Before he arrives let it be a settled thing between us how we mean to receive him."

The latch-key drops through Jack Chamberlayne's unsteady fingers.

"You — you dare to mention that scoundrel's name before me!" he gasps, his livid face turning yet one shade more livid.

"I dare most things, Jack. If I did not — well, there would have been no especial difficulty in my seeing M. Danton, and saying nothing to you on the subject. But that is not my way now. I have taken to truth—Heaven help me!—now that truth can avail so little!"

"And you think, knowing all I do, that I will allow you—my wife—to speak to that man again?"

"I think," says Leah, speaking very low and distinct; far sooner would Jack face passion or violence than that tone. "I think, with all your faults of temper, you are not bad of heart yet. In cold blood, of set purpose, I do not believe that

you would wish to drive me quite to desperation."

"Desperation!" he cries, sinking helplessly into a chair, "why, what preposterous talk are we coming to now? But you don't mean what you say. You are such an actress that you never know yourself whether you are acting or not—by Jove you don't! How can a husband forbidding his wife to see her old lover again drive her to desperation?"

"I am not speaking of generalities—and I don't think this is a time to talk of lovers! I speak of you and myself. If ever human soul was in peril, Jack, 'tis mine—and I ask you—oh, you may call it acting, if you choose, but I am in earnest, horrible earnest. I ask you, my husband, to be my helper."

And before Jack can repulse her, she has sunk down, poor wretch, in her shining silks

and jewels at his side, has thrown her arms,
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CHAPTER XIII.

JACK AS OTHELLO.

A PICTURE pointing a moral scarcely less effective, perhaps, than the immortal morning scene of another marriage à la mode, were some modern Hogarth at hand to limn it. The husband, with his worn young face, his eye-lids heavy and red after the night's dissipation ; sullen, incredulous. The wife, brilliant in her beauty and in the jewels for which she sold herself, ready to cry *peccavi* at his feet, would he listen !

"I am not much inclined for melodramatic scenes at the best of times, Leah, and I am deucedly disinclined for anything but my pillow at this hour of the morning. However, if you will have the row out, you must. You are to be saved from 'desperation,' didn't you say, and through me? Oh Lord, the joke is too good!"

Jack laughs—as spectral, joyless a laugh as you can well conceive of—and Leah unclasps her arms, and shifts nervously away from him.

"A joke! As if any matter that has to do with our lives could be *that*. . . However, we won't stop to quarrel about words, as you are so tired. Jack, my poor boy, do you know that you and I are in an awfully bad way, both of us?"

She has not spoken to him so familiarly for months past; but Jack's haggard face does not soften by a shade. "I know that

I am about as bad as a man can be and live," he answers, "but I cannot see what you have to complain of, Mrs. Chamberlayne. Of course, if we get into tall talk about 'human souls' and 'repentance,' I am dumb. As far as dancing, dressing, and making yourself generally notorious goes, you seem to me about on the par with the rest of the world."

"Yes; and there seems a fair prospect of my notoriety increasing. Lord Stair remained here after you and Bell went away to-night——"

"I have not the slightest doubt that Lord Stair remained," interpolates Jack, trenchantly.

"And he seems more sanguine than ever about getting us an invitation to the Duchess of St. Ives' ball on the thirtieth."

"Don't say 'us,' if you please. I never go to balls—of that kind. I want no social

advancement bought through my wife's influence over Lord Stair."

"Do you not, Jack? Ah, repeat that—it does me good! Tell me you care enough for me to wish to see all this miserable life of ours altered?"

"I wish to heaven you would say out what you have got to say plainly and at once," cries Jack, savagely. "You have a request to make about *your former friend*, M. Danton, and you don't know how to word it. I suppose that is the meaning of all this fine circumlocution. It don't impress me one bit, Mrs. Chamberlayne, mind that! I am not quite such a fool as the actions of others would make me appear. What I believe, I believe: what I mean, I mean; and not all the pretty talking, not all the tearful, sentimental balderdash in the world would move me by an inch. If Danton turns up in London, I know pretty well what the fellow is here for, and I for-

bid you to see him. That's intelligible, I think?"

Leah rises to her feet; white and silent, she stands, watching the set determination of Jack's face. During the vigils she has kept to-night, during the silent hours since Lord Stair left her, heaven knows what resolves for the future, what aspirations towards a better, truer life have traversed her brain. The very mention of Danton's name, the prospect of seeing him, nay, of living only in the same city, of knowing that there is a chance of meeting him in the street, has wrought upon her with a kind of magic might. Dread any disclosure Lord Stair can make! flutter helpless, as a wounded bird, in Lord Stair's hand, for fear! Why, with Danton near, Leah feels 'twere nothing to tell her husband the whole history of her girlish love, own, but not blush over, her weakness, the indiscretion, if you will, of that two hours' starlit walk in the Champs

Elysées, and with a soul purged by honest truth-telling, bravely resolve to hold tighter to the duties of her self-imposed lot henceforward.

This was her dream, gazing out into the grey London day-dawn; the nobler impulses all genuine love evokes—must I add, her intense craving for any untried emotion—urging her to the perilous step of absolute connubial confession. The weak, obstinate face, the ignoble suspicions, the coarse, cruel words (which yet conceal such shrewd worldly sense under their coarseness)—these are the reality.

“You have not much mercy on me, Jack, and I suppose I have no right to expect it. Perhaps if you knew the whole truth, instead of half, it would be better.”

“The whole truth,” he cries, looking up at her with fierce suddenly awakened doubt, “what the —— do you mean by that? What more is there for me to know than

the one degrading fact that this man, Danton, was your lover before you married me? By heavens!" And now he starts to his feet, he stands close, threateningly confronting her. "If anything more than I do know should ever come to my ears, it will be the last day you and I live under the same roof together—make your mind easy as to that. You heard me give my opinion about Tom Lytton's treatment of his wife, did you not?"

"Yes, I heard you."

"Well, and I repeat that Tom Lytton acted right, more than right! And if I found my wife had compromised her good name—aye, ever so slightly, before her marriage, by the Lord that made her and me, she should go!"

"And after her marriage?" But all the transitory softness has died from Leah's face, the old evil glitter is coming in her eyes. "She may lead what life she likes *then*, I

presume, so long as it be the stereotyped life of the world and of society—dress, order her equipages, form her manners upon the model of the last recognised adventuress of the hour, pile on false hair, mountains high, if fashion order it, wear Grecian drapery, rouge on her cheeks, antimony round her eyes—all, anything, and the husband will make no sign ; only shrug his shoulders, and suppose, cynically hopeful, that his wife is no worse than the rest ! But let the same husband discover, by accident, that once, when she was a girl, this woman loved, that once that miserable soul of hers forgot for a day, an hour, to calculate, and he has a right to treat her weakness as a crime. Oh, this is manliness, this is justice, is it not ?”

“I call it claptrap,” replies Jack, ap-
positely. “You have the gift of fluent
speaking, Leah, and I have not ; but I have
a few grains of sense in my head, neverthe-
less. The goings-on of all the fast wives

in London have nothing to do with one fact—that it was a disgrace in you, an engaged girl, to encourage Danton, or any other man, to be your lover. If I had known of your disloyalty in time, I would have walked away from you—yes, at the altar steps. If I find you make an attempt at renewing it now, we don't stop another day under the same roof. I may be an idiot in many things. I have my own ideas of honour and dishonour, and I shall stick to them."

"Honour! How excellently well that word sounds from your lips! Your life, your associates, your habitual treatment of me, are strictly in accordance with these fine principles, are they not?"

Jack Chamberlayne turns white to his very temples. "It is not a question of my life at all. I have never held up my conduct as a model for yours, have I? Look at home, Mrs. Chamberlayne, before you

condemn me for what I do, or do not do. Look at your little friendship for Lord Stair——”

“I understand, Sir, I understand,” cries Leah, transported beyond herself by passion. “My follies are to condone yours—that is the proper term, I think? And we each think no evil, and get on together with tolerable forbearance, as the world goes. Jack, before you came in, as I sat here alone, after Lord Stair had gone away, do you know what I was weak—contemptibly weak—enough to hope?”

“You have told me. That I would allow you to renew your acquaintance with M. Danton.”

“I was weak enough to hope that you and I—Jack Chamberlayne and his wife—might be more to each other than we have ever been, and make a fresh start yet. I meant, as heaven is my witness, to speak such truth to you as I never spoke before

since our marriage. I meant—but it matters nothing now. The weakness is past. I see how far you are likely to appreciate truth-telling, and you may be sure I shall not err in that direction again.”

She pauses; her breast heaving heavily, her eyes suffused. Any man but a Jack Chamberlayne must surely at such a moment believe in her sincerity, take her, with all her faults, back to his heart, and leave his future to heaven and to her. But Jack is literally without the capacity for this sort of unbidden instinctive forgiveness. In a certain stumbling way the creature is honest; holds with the rigidity of a narrow intelligence, to the word that he has spoken, the principle or prejudice that he has once acknowledged as right. Ask bread from stones sooner than generous emotion from a man whose moral and physical nature had been wrecked by such a youth as his!

“You are a deuced good actress Leah,

deuced good! Unfortunately I have seen too much of that sort of thing, before and behind the curtain, to be fetched by it now. I remember Paris, and how you deceived me up to our wedding-day, and past. And I remember Rome, and Deb's letter. The same woman will never deceive me twice, if I know it."

"She will never try. Don't let your peace be disturbed on that point."

"And I may go to bed, I hope. The scene is ended. We have not gained very much by all our talking, that I can see."

"Not very much. Still, we understand each other a little more clearly than we did this morning — that is something gained. You don't want our lives changed it seems——"

"I don't intend your visiting-list to include M. Danton, my dear. Keep to the point at issue. If that man turns up in

London . . . he *is* in London, by ——!" cries Jack with abrupt energy. "I know that he is here, at this moment . . . you have my orders to cut him if you should see him in the street, to refuse him admittance if he has the impertinence to call at this hotel. You hear me?"

Leah makes no answer. She moves away from him, walks to the window, and there stands, stonily gazing out at the prospect of closed shutters and empty pavements it commands.

"You hear me, my dear?" repeats Jack, grimly affectionate. "If our Paris acquaintance, M. Danton, should happen to turn up in London, I consider it better, after certain little untoward circumstances that are done with, if not forgotten, that the acquaintance shall not be renewed."

"If M. Danton should come to London," and as she speaks, Leah turns; she looks at her husband with coldly steady eyes,—“if

M. Danton should come to London, or to any place on earth where I am, and we meet, I shall hold out my hand to him if he will receive it! And until the hour of my death I shall call M. Danton my friend—the only man in this whole desolate world of whom I can say so much.”

“You will?”

“So help me God, I will.”

“Very well, then, Mrs. Chamberlayne,” —strengthening epithets must at this point be lavishly imagined,—“you have expressed your determination; now hear mine. You will hold out your hand to M. Danton, you say; you will continue to call him your friend? Do so! And on the day that I discover your treachery, I will bring you to the open shame you deserve by wishing you good-bye for ever. As you remark, we understand each other.”

“To a nicety! Only it may happen that

you would wish to drive me quite to desperation."

"Desperation!" he cries, sinking helplessly into a chair, "why, what preposterous talk are we coming to now? But you don't mean what you say. You are such an actress that you never know yourself whether you are acting or not—by Jove you don't! How can a husband forbidding his wife to see her old lover again drive her to desperation?"

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